Small Christian Communities

“God made people because he loves stories…”

Jewish Proverb

The Mission of the Small Christian Community Core Team

Our mission is to promote and support small Christian communities within our church, thus strengthening our church and beyond.

Our Goals:

- To form new Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in our parish and provide assistance to existing groups as needed
- To provide informational and enriching events, evenings, workshops, speakers, etc. to further support SCCs
- To provide resource materials to strengthen groups, for meetings, outreach, and more
- To provide materials for facilitator training as needed

What is a Small Christian Community (SCC)?

- a source of spiritual nourishment
- a way of participating in the parish
- a way of being church – carrying out the mission of the Church

Small Christian communities (SCC) are formed to support the on-going need for members of the church to be in intimate and ever-deepening relationship with Jesus. Also referred to as Faith Sharing groups, SCC represent a way of knowing Jesus, growing our faith in Jesus by the study of his Holy Word, and showing our discipleship to him and his Word through service to each other, our parish, and to the community in which we live.

Contact Information:

Small Christian Communities: Church of the Presentation, 271 West Saddle River Rd, Upper Saddle River, NJ
Call: Ronnie and Pat Brunnock at (201) 391-9090

Your story is part of God’s story
There is an abundance of resources available on the internet, amazon.com, Christian book stores, our church library, and more. What we have listed below are some of the resources we have used with our own long term SCCs and may be a good starting point for you and your group. The books are broken into categories by experience of an SCC group: New Groups, Experienced Group and for facilitators. If you have suggestions to share, please email us.

**BOOKS**

**New Groups**

1) **Quest** by the Diocese of Hartford, CT. Pb $6 each. (860) 243-9642
   
   Booklets are Sunday scripture-based reflections. They are published in the Spring, Summer and Fall every year. Each weekly unit offers the elements for a complete small community session, including:
   
   ♦ Suggestions for creating a reflective environment
   ♦ Opening and closing prayer
   ♦ Focus questions relating everyday life to scripture
   ♦ Commentary on the Sunday lectionary readings
   ♦ Experience-based faith sharing questions
   ♦ Ideas for individual/group response in action

   Books can be purchased through [www.sccquest.org/resources](http://www.sccquest.org/resources)

2) **Longing for the Holy** by Renew authors:
   
   Spirituality for every day based on the insights of Ronald Rolheiser. 12 full meetings based on Renew format of scripture, reflection and action. Highly recommended. RENEW (888) 433-3221 or www.renewintl.org to obtain a copy of their brochure for all of their materials for SCCs, including **Longing for the Holy**

3) **Prayer** by Joyce Rupp, Orbis Books pb.
   
   Material for about 8 meeting with prayers, commentary and questions. Highly recommended for groups interested in enriching their relationship with God.

4) **Care for All of Creation**, Intercommunity for Peace and Justice, pb. ipjc.org
   
   Booklet—6 meetings, each includes prayer, education, Catholic social teaching, discussion, hope and action. A thoughtful introduction to and discussion of eco-spirituality, the universe story and environmental interdependence.

5) **Traits of a Healthy Spirituality** by Melanie Svoboda, 23rdPublications.com
   
   20 Different essays with questions for personal reflection, a meditation and a prayer on such themes as courage, forgiveness, friendship. This is a great reality check on how we live our faith today.

**Existing Groups**

6) **Living Like Francis Today** by Marci Bloom, Good Ground Press (800) 232-5533. pb
   
   Six faith-filled sharing sessions on Franciscan spirituality. Each begins and ends with prayer and reflections questions. The core of each session are stories of Francis’ life and scripture passages he loved and lived by. A fresh, engaging look at the meaning of the Christian life in today’s world.
7) Mother Teresa’s Prescription: Finding Happiness and Peace in Service, by Paul Wright, MD, Ave Maria Press pb. An inspiring story of transformation, successful cardiologist Paul Wright shares his dramatic shift in values and lifestyle after seeking guidance from Mother Teresa. Short chapters and questions.

8) My Life with the Saints by James Martin, S.J., Loyola Press, pb
18 rich, engaging chapters/meetings which meld Martin’s entirely modern life with those of his saintly friends. Describes how the saints can help us find holiness in our own lives. He has received many national awards. There is a discussion guide available on www.loyolapress.com/my-life-with-the-saints. Better for seasoned groups.

9) Scarred by Struggle ~ Transformed by Hope by Joan Chittister, Eerdmans Publishers, Hardcover
20+ chapters/meetings infused with hope, encouragement, challenge and inspiration. The Spiritual task of life is to feed the hope that comes out of despair. Hope is not something to be found outside of ourselves. We cultivate it from within.

10) Serendipity Bible. Zondervan, Hardcover
A practical, flexible, easy-to-use book providing discussion questions on many of the passages of Scripture you wish to address. Over 200 studies and 60 course outlines to use depending on what topics you want to address.

11) The Our Father by Sr. Joan Mitchell, Good Ground Press, pb goodgroundpress.com
8 meetings with reflections, questions, and prayers. The content invites groups to rediscover Jesus’ uncommon mission in the most common and familiar of prayers.

12) The Ten Commandments ~ Laws of the Heart by Sr. Joan Chittister, Orbis Books, 12 chapters / 12meetings. A thoughtful inquiry into how each commandment calls us to act in today’s world.

13) Becoming Fully Human by Sr. Joan Chittister, eriebenedictines.org pb
Centered around twelve questions, these chapters reveal that human desires, fears and hopes are universal. Leads us to lives of balance and respect. **For experienced groups.**

14) 10 Gospel Promises for Later Life by Jean Thibault, Upper Room Books, pb
Good news that speaks to the experiences of older adults encouraging continued growth, love and wisdom.

15) Consuming Faith by Tom Beaudoin, Sheed and Ward, pb
Can there be a divine economy? Each chapter offers essays for realistic spirituality for our consumer society. A call for a responsible attitude in buying and consuming. For experienced groups.

16) Find God @ Work by Gregory Pierce, Renew Publication Renewintl.org, pb
Practicing spirituality in your workplace. 6 sessions of faith sharing designed to help the group think differently about their work and share their experience with others. Topics include: dealing with others at work, balancing work, personal, family, church and community responsibilities; and deciding right and wrong at work.
17) **Turning Points** by James Philipps; Twenty Third Publications, pb
Unlocking the treasures of the church. 8 Chapters, 8 sessions. Take a tour of eight fundamental turning points in the history of the church. The Council of Jerusalem; the Apostate Crisis; the Edict of Milan, the Eastern Schism; the High Middle Ages, the Protestant Reformation, the Peace of Westphalia, and the Second Vatican Council. Know when to explore and deepen your understanding of how the church has changed and grown throughout its history.

18) **The Cup of Our Life** by Joyce Rupp; Ave Maria Press, pb
Anyone thirsting for a more intimate and disciplined life of prayer will find a rich wellspring in The Cup of Our Life. This book shares how the everyday ordinary cups we use can become sacred vessels connecting us with life and draw us ever closer to God. She explores how the cup is a rich symbol of life, with its emptiness and fullness, its brokenness and flaws and all of its blessings. There are six weekly themes based on the cup. Each day has a section that includes an essay, a wisdom saying, a scripture passage, an image exercise using a cup, prayers, questions for journaling and a practice to be carried out during the rest of the day.

19) **Gracious Goodness** by Melanie Svoboda; Loyola Press (loyolabooks.org), pb
50 short meditations on gifts of the Spirit based on scripture….includes a relevant quote, reflection and question. Use in combination with another resource. *Not sufficient for a full meeting.*

20) **When the Moon Slips Away** by Melanie Svoboda; 23rdpublications.com, pb
36 short meditations on refreshing new insights on nature. Celebrate God’s presence through a natural phenomena like the moon, wind, air etc. Each chapter begins with a thought-provoking quotation from a wide variety of sources and includes questions for personal reflection and/or communal sharing, followed by an appropriate quotation from scripture. Each chapter concludes with a short prayer that flows from the reflection. *Not sufficient for a full meeting.*

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**Facilitator Assistance:**

1) **Sowing Seeds** by Renew Staff, renewintl.org pb
Essentials for small community leaders, group dynamics and community building. A must for creating an excellent SCC. It offers simple, practical suggestions and pastoral insight to help guide and enhance your small community and nourish their spiritual growth.

2) **Creating Community** by Barbara Howard & William Antonia
Fresh, practical ideas for starting a new Small Christian Community or revitalizing your existing one. Replete with helps and how-to's for small groups meeting in homes, the Resources for Small Christian Communities series, published in cooperation with Buena Vista

3) **Getting a Grip on Your Group** by Barbara A. Darling, Good Ground Press
This practical little book helps recognize the unspoken expectations in groups, establish realistic goals and conclude with a celebration of covenant. Especially valuable for established groups.

4) **The Small Group Covenant**—article—click on side bar on articles link

5) **5 Elements of An SCC article**—click on side bar on articles link
**Supplementary Books / Shorter Reflections / Prayers:**

1) **Water, Wind, Earth and Fire** by Christine Valters Paintner, Sorin Books pb $14
   - Christian practice of praying with the elements. Reflections, questions and prayers.

2) **God's Enduring Presence** by Joyce Rupp, Twenty-Third Publications, pb $14
   - Strength for the spiritual journey. 50 brief, readable meditations, short prayers based on the liturgical seasons and ordinary time.

3) **SUNDAY BY SUNDAY**: Four-page weekly for adults and teens that invites readers to the regular spiritual exercise of reflecting on the Sunday scriptures together. The material is suitable for a SCC, RCIA or a scripture study group and has four component elements: prayer, a pamphlet of commentary on the Sunday scripture, community sharing, and concludes with a call to service and justice. For teens the series offers the lectionary based The Spirit Program. The series can be purchased in annual or smaller units or simply in a seasonal package (Advent and Lent). Call 800-232-5533 or through the website: www.goodgroundpress.com

4) **Exploring the Sunday Readings**: A four-page monthly publication that includes scripture reflections, faith sharing questions and a call to make a faith response for the particular Sunday. The approach is simple and direct with no frills. To order call Twenty-Third Publications at 800-321-0411 or visit their website www.twentythirdpublications.com

5) **Share the Word**: Devotional articles and scriptural material for personal or communal sharing, reflection and growth. Each edition provides guidelines, commentary and questions for faith-sharing all the Sunday scriptures in the liturgical cycle. The tone of its publications is evangelization as the essential component of our Christian life. For the weekday readings, a short meditation is offered to enrich the sense of the scripture. The devotional is available through Paulist National Catholic Evangelization Association by calling 202-832-5022 or visiting their website www.paulistpress.com

6) **Living Liturgy**: Spirituality, Celebration and Catechesis for Sundays and Solemnities is a treasure for faith-sharing in and of itself because it offers the entire text for the Sunday readings along with a commentary on the scriptures and catechetical instruction. Living Liturgy provides a practical and prayerful means to reflect on, celebrate and live the paschal mystery. Each liturgical cycle is completely redone annually. To order call the Liturgical Press at 800-585-5450 or visit their website at www.litpress.org

7) **At Home with the Word** - Sunday Scriptures and Scripture Insights. Useful for meditation on the Sunday scriptures by yourself or with others. Appropriate for every Sunday of the Liturgical Year, it provides the three scripture readings and psalm as well as insights into the readings and suggestions for reflection. Contact: Liturgy Training Publications www.ltp.org

8) **Sharing God's Word Through the Year** - A Guide for Small Groups of Young Adults - Cycles A, B & C. Sharing God's Word Through the Year helps young adults reflect on the Scripture and relate them to daily life in a small faith sharing group. It uses the Gospel readings from each Sunday as a springboard for reflection. A short historical-cultural commentary helps young adults understand the context of the Sunday readings. Each Sunday includes a story written by a young adult on the meaning of the gospel theme. The questions for discussion and sharing along with the action suggestions are geared to the needs and issues of people in their twenties. The binder is fully reproducible and ready to use in a variety of settings. Contact: Center for Ministry Development 203-723-1622, www.cmdnet.com

9) **Emmaus Journey** - A Catholic Bible Study from the Word Among Us Press. This set of booklets incorporate reflection on Scripture passages around various important topics of personal spirituality and discipleship. Each discussion topic is presented and reinforced by references to valuable Catholic resources. Contact: info@emmausjourney.org
10) **MOMS: Ministry of Mothers** Sharing creates an awareness of the inner sacred self while teaching new ways to inspire, encourage and affirm each other. Through the process of personal and spiritual growth, women have the opportunity to clarify their values, claim their own giftedness, and bring new strengths to their family relationships and to the Christian Community. The experience triggers a growth in faith and engagement in the life of the Church. For more information contact the national M.O.M.S office at (651) 748-4089 or visit their website at [http://www.stpaulsmonastery.org/6-moms/introduction.html](http://www.stpaulsmonastery.org/6-moms/introduction.html)

11) **Come As You Are**. A Small Group Program about Everyday Living. This is a 12 -session program with a participant book for each member of the group, a facilitator’s guide, and audio tapes. It is meant for a group that is beginning, or a group of people who may be experienced in small groups but have never been together with each other in this format. Available also in Spanish. [http://www.naprc.faithweb.com/ordering_information.htm](http://www.naprc.faithweb.com/ordering_information.htm)

**DVDs/Movies**

1) **NOOMA DVDs** are a series of short films, each about 10 to 14 minutes, promoting spiritual reflections relating to real life individual experiences. The name NOOMA comes from a phonetic spelling of the Greek word πνεύμα (pneuma), meaning "wind," "spirit," or "breath." The video series consists of 24 videos created from 2002-2009 featuring Christian teacher Rob Bell of Mars Hill Bible Church and produced by Flannel. Each short story covers a specific topic, usually by relating various experiences from a Christian perspective. For example: Rain: "Things don't always work out the way we want them to.", Flame: "What's up with the word love?", Trees: "Do our lives really matter?", | Sunday: "Why do we do the things we do?" Store: "We all get angry about things from time to time.", Whirlwind: "What do we do when there aren't nice, neat answers?"

2) **The Shawshank Redemption**; - A powerful prison drama reminds us that hope is a precious and buoyant emotion that can give our lives substance and meaning.

3) **The Way**– A powerful and inspirational story about family, friends, and the challenges we face while navigating this ever-changing and complicated world. A journey of a father honoring his deceased son’s desire to finish the pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago in Spain. Discover the difference between “the life we live and the life we choose.”

4) **Deadman Walking** –A nun, while comforting a convicted killer on death row, empathized with both the killer and his victim’s families. Won the Oscar Award

5) **The Saint of 911**– About Father Mychal Judge, compassionate champion of the needy and forgotten, and a beloved Fired Department Chaplain. He struggled with alcoholism and was gay, both in which the movie portrays. He perished during 9/11

6) **Oh God!**- God appears as a good natured old man to an assistant grocery manager, God selects him as his messenger for the modern world.

**SCC Participants Quotes:**

“Belonging to a small Christian communities has really added not just to my spiritual life but it has carried over to my husband, my kids, my friends. I am so enriched every time I meet with my group. Thank you for providing such a wonderful experience….over and over and over.” MM of Allendale

“I am not sure what I would have done if I didn’t have my small Christian community to stand by me when my child was hospitalized after a very serious car accident” I am so lucky. TC of Midland Park
7) **Intouchables**— A true story of a wealthy, physically disabled risk taker, who lost his wife in an accident and whose world is turned upside down when he hires a young, good-humored, black Muslim ex-con as his caretaker. Their bond proves the power and omniscience that love and friendship can hold over all social and economic differences.

8) **Cast Away**—is a compelling tale of survival about a driven and self-absorbed businessman who is stranded on a Pacific island. He learns that hope is a secret buried inside us that is just waiting to rise to the surface when we need it most.

9) **The Horse Whisperer**—A compelling drama about a girl and her horse injured in a serious accident, The Horse Whisperer reminds us that healing, grief, guilt, severe wounds, and tattered relationships take time. This film tutors us in slowing down, quieting the heart, and being present.

10) **Tender Mercies**— is a remarkable film about a country and western singer, a widow, and her son who try to drive away the shadows of the past in order to become strong in the broken places of their lives. Along the way they become instruments of God's grace for each other.

### Magazines: all of these can be “Googled” for more information

- **America**
- **Christian Century**
- **Christianity Today**
- **Commentary**
- **Commonweal**
- **Spirituality and Health**
- **Sojourners**
- **U.S. Catholics**

### Websites:

- Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative:  
  http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/north-america
- http://www.sccconnect.org/
- http://www.sccquest.org/resources.html
- http://www.smallgroups.com
- Spirituality and Practice—  ww.spiritualityandpractice.com
- Renew International — http://www.renewintl.org
- Benedictine Publishers— www.benetvision.org
- Marynoll Publishers-  www.orbisbooks.com
- Richard Rohr - www.cac.org
- Former St. Anthony Messenger— www.franciscanmedia.org
- Scripture of the day — Lightfortheday.com
- Thought for the day— Thewhisperofgod.com
- Daily scripture online - Sacredspace.com
- Short daily story relating to scripture—Dailybread.com

### CATHOLIC iPhone & iPad APPS— see ITunes Store

- Travelling? Need Mass Times? Try:  
  Have 20 minutes left on your lunch break? Try: iRosary -

- Delay at the airport? View Catholic TV:
One of the first things Christ did in his public ministry was gather a community around him. He left his followers with the presence of the Spirit and the gift of companionship. The early church embodied these gifts by meeting in small communities.

“A small Christian community is a face-to-face gathering of ten to twelve people who invest time with one another for the common purpose of applying gospel values to every aspect of their lives.”


We are always adding, adjusting, updating our website. So come back to visit often.
Feel free to print out articles or forms to use with your own group.
Community Can’t Be Taken for Granted

Community is a matter of the heart and the mind. It cannot be created by place alone, and it cannot be destroyed by distance alone.

It is the essence of the soul.

What we identify with, what give us a sense of purpose, of belonging, of support is our community.

Community building does not just happen. It cannot be taken for granted. It requires both great faith and great trust that is generated by a continuing display of great human care that begins with me, and then comes back to me.

It takes a great deal of energy to create community. And in today’s world, community takes many shapes.

The kind of community for which the ancient Rule of Benedict is written, is based on a great deal of common physical presence.

But as the world enlarges, so does the concept of community. The physical is still important— but differently. Now community is often virtual, but just as real in many dimensions as sitting next to the same person in chapel our entire lives.

In the Monastery of the Heart, what is important is that we each be an extension of the Gospel, and an extension of each other, and an extension of Benedictine spirituality at the same time.

What is central is that together we use our goods for something greater than ourselves, that we “do not store up grain in barns,” as the scriptures say, for our own security alone, but use the profits of our labor for the good of others, as well.

It is a process of making all of human community real, and of doing it out of a common vision and one heart, in whatever form is available— so that the spirit of community that is Benedictine to its core may spread like a holy plague throughout the world.

Reflection comes from Sr. Joan Chittister’s book The Monastery of the Heart: An Invitation to a Meaningful Life (BlueBridge).

“Small communities are powerful vehicles for adult faith formation, providing opportunities for learning, prayer, mutual support and the shared experience of Christian living and service to church and society.”

Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us, NCCB, 1999

“Small church communities not only foster the faith of individuals; they are living cells that build up the Body of Christ.”

Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium
What is a Small Christian Community (SCC)?

- A gathering of people (usually 6-12) that:
  - Pray, listen and theologically reflect upon Scripture together
  - Share ways the Word of God relates to one’s life experience – connect everyday life with faith.
  - Take on responsibility for living as Church in the world
  - Encourage and support one another
  - Are sent in mission to serve others

It’s an experience of the larger Church at the smaller level

Small Christian Communities are Not:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bible study groups</th>
<th>though Scripture is an important part</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Counseling groups</td>
<td>but they can be therapeutic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayer groups</td>
<td>although prayer is the foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social groups</td>
<td>though relationships and caring are essential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching groups</td>
<td>but catechesis (faith formation) is an essential element</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice groups</td>
<td>although they work to transform society</td>
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What is Faith sharing?

Faith Sharing is a process in which we relate the story of the people of God with our own story. We draw a connection between how God has acted - as seen in Scripture, creeds, liturgy and history and how God is acting to draw us closer to God in our own lives. Our personal history; our relationship with the Church; our gifts and vocation; and the context of our lives, with their relationships, responsibilities and opportunities, are reflected upon in faith sharing.

One of the wonderful things about faith sharing is that there are no “right” answers. When we share faith we are sharing from our own experience. Members share what the readings say to them in reference to their own lives.

How Will this benefit my Life?

- Deepening of relationships with God and others
- Challenge to grow as a person.
- Deepening one’s commitment to family, work, neighborhood and community.
- Support in living as a follower of Jesus Christ, working to transform society.

How will the parish benefit?

Parish life studies show that Small Christian Communities yield long-term benefits. Parishioners are:
- more interested in on-going catechesis; they pursue Scripture study and take seriously the call to discipleship,
- more likely to assume parish responsibilities and enter the pool of potential parish leadership,
- more involved in evangelization and outreach.

Church of the Presentation, Upper Saddle River, NJ 07458 (201) 327-1313 Small Christian Communities
Five Elements of a Small Christian Community

Prayer

Continued Learning

Mutual Support

Faith Sharing

Outreach

Church of the Presentation, Upper Saddle River, NJ 07458 (201) 327-1313 Small Christian Communities
Ten Characteristics of Small Christian Communities:

1. **Shared Vision.** Groups who endure are ones who have a shared vision – they know why they are gathering. Members take the time and effort to identify and dedicate themselves to common goals.

2. **Good prayer and ritual** helps provide a spiritual depth that calls members back again and again. The prayer and ritual in these groups holds a prominent position in the life of the group – they honor the sacred and keep this element in the forefront of their gatherings.

3. **Shared work.** The work of the group – from facilitating to hosting and providing hospitality is shared in long-standing groups. The work of a group must be shared, it is too much for one or two people to maintain. Also, Ken Blakeman (AZ) notes that, “Having all members facilitate a gathering keeps everyone committed and lets each individual’s creativity benefit the group.”

4. **Strong relationships,** built over time and with care, “provide ballast” to communities who thrive, according to Jim Silva (CA.) Social time, outings, good communication, mutual respect and countless other components and skills help build up this area.

5. **FUN!** Groups who have fun together tend to continue to want to be together. They come back for more. This one is often overlooked!

6. **Evaluate and Review.** Groups benefit from regular evaluation and review of expectations. Peter Eichten (MN) suggests “At least twice a year spend a session going over expectations: What do you want/need from this group? Are those wants/needs being met? If they are not, what can we do to meet them? Or, can I shift my expectations and still be actively involved in this group?”

7. **Act.** Groups who “do something” become bonded together. It acts like a glue and is considered “THE community builder” by Felicia Wolfe (IL). Those familiar with the SCC world will recognize the element “service/social justice” as one of the important ways groups act to do something together. Mary Ann Jeselson (NJ) related that her group does 3 or 4 soup kitchens each year and they collect clothes, blankets, towels and food for Catholic Worker in New York City.

8. **Variety.** Alternating the format occasionally keeps gatherings fresh. Groups have reported many options for gatherings. Some ideas include review a movie together, have a guest speaker, visit and walk a labyrinth, study a book, try a new faith sharing guide, visit a homeless shelter, write letters to prisoners...

9. **Substantial.** Groups who engage in true dialog and dare to delve deeply into conversation and spirituality are the ones that call members back again and again. The dialog may be in the form of in-depth sharing of members own experiences, feelings and thoughts OR dialog about matters of faith and justice. The “in-depth” part of the sharing seems to be important. Felicia Wolf (IL) has noted that a group/community is in dialog when “everyone says something in the first 15 minutes of the meeting, when they have the endurance to stay with the hard questions, and when members say, ‘I was so tired tonight I did not think I wanted to come, but now I am glad because I have so much energy.’”

10. **Light of heart.** Finally, groups that endure have a sense of humor. They laugh, allow for differences, and “don't take themselves too seriously” according to Barb Darling (FL).
The Small Group Covenant

1. We accept one another as we are

2. We share our struggles and successes, joy and pains as we want too

3. We are honest

4. We listen with out judgment or criticism to whomever is speaking

5. We never criticize or condemn what anyone shares

6. We do not give advice, we gather to care, not to cure.

7. We share experiences from our own lives in our own words, using “I” statements. Personal sharing is the basis on which we build and maintain our relationships.

8. Everything we share is confidential

9. We are free to remain silence

10. We will make attendance at meetings a priority

11. We will support each other in appropriate ways. Encouragement and affirmation are important in our relationships

12. Turn off all cell phones
Listen

When I ask you to listen to me,
    And you start giving me advice,
    You have not done what I asked.
When I ask that you listen to me,
    And you begin to tell me why I
    Shouldn’t feel that way,
    You are trampling on my feelings.
When I ask you to listen to me,
    And you feel you have to do something to solve my problems.
    You have failed me, strange as that may seem.
Listen: all that I ask is that you listen, not talk or do – just hear me.
When you do something for me
    That I need to do for myself,
    You contribute to my fear and feelings of inadequacy.
But when you accept as a simple fact
    That I do feel what I feel, no matter how irrational,
    Then I can quit trying to convince you
    And go about the business of understanding what’s behind my feelings.
So, please listen and just hear me
And, if you want to talk,
    Wait a minute for your turn – and
I’ll listen to you.
How to Recruit Potential Small-Group Leaders

A step-by-step approach to an important slice of your group ministry

Thomas G. Kirkpatrick | posted 1/23/2008

Effective small-group leadership requires particular abilities and developed skills. In a word, your ministry thrives on the gift of leadership. This means you need to take much care in recruiting your potential group leaders. In fact, selection of potential small-group leaders should receive the same kind of attention as does the selection of church officers.

Because so few church members have enough experience, training, or confidence to lead effective small groups, a church's pool of small-group leaders is typically small. Rare indeed is the church with enough small-group leaders in place to staff a congregation-wide small-group program. Fortunately, however, most churches probably have more than enough potential small-group leaders among their members. All that is lacking, then, is for you to call them forth and train them.

Because the task of recruiting potential small-group leaders is similar to recruiting church officers, your steering committee's recruitment process is like that of a church's nominating committee. First, list the desired qualities or characteristics for prospective nominees. Then use these criteria to select possible candidates. Finally, ask an adequate number of potential small-group leaders to consider this calling.

Listing Qualities of Small-Group Leaders

While you can find the necessary qualities or requirements for church officers in a church's constitution or by-laws, you'll probably have to develop a list of desirable qualities for small-group leaders. As with the creation of other elements in the planning process (such as purpose, goals, and strategy), it's best to brainstorm and generate a list of desirable qualities for effective small-group leaders.

Here is a list one church developed. The effective small-group leader:

- Is open to others and willing to share.
- Accepts others and is nonjudgmental.
- Is willing and able to take initiative.
- Is a good listener.
- Is a growing person.
- Is warm and supportive.
- Has confidence in groups.
- Has a healthy commitment to Jesus Christ.
- Is committed to the church.

As is the case for church officers, you probably won't find many people that possess all of the desired qualities. Generally speaking, look for people who have healthy, effective interpersonal relations. A list of qualities such as the example above can serve as a guideline to discover people who have or who are likely to develop such characteristics.

It is probably unwise to nominate someone who is perceived negatively on any of the qualities on your list. For example, someone who is typically judgmental in interpersonal relations will probably have a difficult time leading an effective group with or without training. Moreover, someone whose faith commitment is antagonistic to Christian beliefs or who is a disgruntled, inactive member is unlikely to have a satisfying group leadership experience.
Once you reach a consensus on the qualities you desire in potential small-group leaders, you are ready to assemble and prioritize a list of prospects.

**Discovering Prospective Small-Group Leaders**

A number of people who possess the qualities of effective group leadership may not consider themselves, or have been considered by others, to be "leaders." Remember, what you seek are people who fit the qualities of potential small-group leader.

To discover candidates for leading small groups, turn to your church's membership directory. This helps your committee to consider everyone in the congregation—not just those who come to mind or who are already serving in other leadership positions. At first, ask committee members to work alone, generating a list of leader candidates. Then the committee can compare notes and decide whom to ask to consider this ministry. A good way to achieve consensus is to list everyone's candidates on a blackboard or newsprint. Then discuss each candidate's qualifications for leading a small group.

Remind everyone that this is a call process, not a popularity contest. Neither neglect anyone whose name appears nor discontinue consideration of anyone on any grounds other than that the person does not fit the adopted qualities for effective group leaders. Let people decide for themselves whether or not they wish to participate—do not exclude any "qualified" prospects from your "to be contacted about training" list.

There may be one exception to this rule—if there are too many qualified candidates. If this happens, prioritize your list, taking into account the type of balance desired among your small-group leaders. Such factors might include gender, ethnicity, age, disability, marital status, level of involvement, years of membership, and faith development. In any event, take great care to ensure that the people you select represent your church's diversity. Overlook no group in the church for leadership in your small-group ministry.

**Contacting Prospective Small-Group Leaders**

The number of people you should contact depends on the number of new groups you project. For example, I know of a 250-member church that asked 15 people to participate in its training course. This included all its qualified prospective leaders, which was enough to lead the 10 to 15 new groups that were projected.

I also know of a 1,200-member congregation that generated an initial list of 120 qualified potential leaders. Because its steering committee expected many people on the list not to participate, it contacted all 120 prospects, calculating that they would train enough people to lead the projected 40 or 50 new small groups.

In both instances, the number of desired new groups was based on the expectation that one-third to one-half of their members would join a small-group ministry in its first phase of expansion. In my experience, this expectation is realistic.

But what if the number of new groups you project is greater than your number of qualified prospective leaders? In such a case I suggest you lower the number of projected new groups. Unqualified prospective leaders are likely to become ineffective group leaders, resulting in frustration for everyone involved. Your congregation must be realistic enough to work within its gifts and resources. If you find yourself in this situation, foster the notion that "small is beautiful"—to do otherwise for the sake of some artificial numbers game could well prove detrimental to your church's ministry.

Who should contact potential small-group leaders? In short, whoever is most likely to get a candidate to give serious consideration to the call. How should you contact prospective leaders? Either face-to-face or by telephone. Clearly and succinctly summarize the leadership qualities you see in the person and the commitment
by telephone. Clearly and succinctly summarize the leadership qualities you see in the person and the commitment you seek.

**Here are suggestions for an actual phone conversation:**

I'm calling on behalf of our church's small-group steering committee. The fellowship committee recently formed our steering committee to expand our church's small-group ministry. This fall we'll be offering training for new small-group leaders. We expect to begin new small groups just after the first of next year. As we thought about members of our church who might be good small-group leaders, your name came up.

We thought of you because of your … (refer to the qualities you see, such as openness to others, warmth, and supportiveness). Our seven-week training course is set for Thursday evenings, late October through mid-December. We hope you will consider taking this course.

After the training, if you'd like to lead a group, that's great; if not, that's fine, too. We think the training will be useful to you regardless of your decision. What do you think? Do you have any questions? Take some time to think and pray about this if you'd like. Let's be in touch by next Wednesday for your decision.
Three Trees

Once there were 3 trees on a hill in the woods.

They were discussing their hopes and dreams when the 1st tree said, "Someday, I hope to be a treasure chest. I could be filled with gold, silver and precious gems and be decorated with intricate carvings. Everyone would see my beauty."

The 2nd tree said, "Someday, I will be a mighty ship. I will take kings and queens across the waters and sail to the corners of other world. Everyone will feel safe in me because of the strength of my hull."

Finally, the 3rd tree said, "I want to grow to be the tallest and straightest tree in the forest. People will see me on top of the hill and look up to my branches, and think of the heavens and God and how close to them I am reaching. I will be the greatest tree of all time, and people will always remember me."

After a few years of praying that their dreams would come true, a group of woodsmen came upon the trees. One came to the 1st tree and said, "This looks like a strong tree, I think I should be able to sell the wood to a carpenter," and he began cutting it down. The tree was happy, because he knew that the carpenter would make him into a treasure chest.

At the 2nd tree, one of the other woodsman said, "This looks like a strong tree. I should be able to sell it to the shipyard." The 2nd tree was happy, because he knew he was on his way to becoming a mighty ship.

When the woodsmen came upon the 3rd tree, the tree was frightened, because it knew that, if it gets cuts down, its dream would not come true. One of the woodsmen said, "I don't need anything special from my tree, so I'll take this one," and he cut it down.

When the 1st tree arrived at the carpenter's, he was made into a feed box for animals, placed in a barn and filled with hay. This was not at all what he had prayed for.

The 2nd tree was cut and made into a small fishing boat. His dreams of being a mighty ship and carrying kings had come to an end.

The 3rd tree was cut into large pieces and left alone in the dark.

The years went by, and the trees forgot about their dreams. Then one filtered day, a man and woman came to the barn. She gave birth, and they placed the baby in the hay in the feed box that was made from the first tree. The man wished that he could have made a crib for the baby, but this manger would have to do. The tree could feel the importance of this event and knew that it had held the greatest treasure of all time.

Years later, a group of men got in the fishing boat made from the second tree. One of them was
tired and went to sleep. While they were out on the water, a great storm arose, and the tree didn't think it was strong enough to keep the men safe.

The men woke the sleeping man, and he stood and said "Peace," and the storm stopped. At this time, the tree knew that it had carried the King of Kings in its boat.

Finally, someone came and got the third tree. It was carried through the streets, and the crowd mocked the man who was carrying it.

Finally, the man was nailed to the tree and raised in the air to die at the top of a hill.

When Sunday came, the tree came to realize that it was strong enough to stand at the top of the hill and be as close to God as possible, because Jesus had been crucified on it.

The moral of this story is that, when things don't seem to be going your way, always know that God has a plan for you. If you place your trust in Him, He will give you great gifts.

Each of the trees got what they wanted, just not in the way they had imagined.

_We don't always know what God's plans are for us._

_We just know that His ways are not our ways, but His ways are always best. Keep it moving...pass it on, so it could inspire more people._

_Sometimes the heart sees what the eyes can't._

Church of the Presentation, Upper Saddle River, NJ  07458  (201) 327-1313 Small Christian Communities
FOR EVERYTHING THERE IS A SEASON
by Daniel Rebant

From the Book of Ecclesiastes, chapter 3, verses 1-8:

“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:
a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to throw away;
a time to tear, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace.”

This sacred list represents all the seasons and the important matters of our lives. Some are happy times, others sad; some are productive while others seem wasteful; some inspire peace and others bring pain.

All of them are necessary for us to learn, grow, and evolve as spiritual beings. Their appearance is not by accident. If we look closely enough, each experience reveals a loving, divine purpose that we can learn to trust.

Look for the Gift

Each major transition in our lives requires our undivided time and attention for successful passage. Each one also presents a gift—if we're open to receiving it.

Some of these gifts are easy to identify: the spring moments of new beginnings; the summer moments of easy, carefree living; and the autumn moments of bountiful harvest.

Other gifts are not so easy to identify, such as the transitional storms that often usher in a new season, the oppressive heat of summer, or the bitter cold of winter. These other gifts require us to look beyond the appearances and peer much deeper for their significance.

Although new beginnings are usually preferred over endings, we should remember that every new beginning requires an ending—sometimes even a death.

Likewise, reaping a harvest may be preferred over the work of preparing, planting, and tending a crop or garden, but we cannot enjoy one without the other. Even the transitional storms of our lives are necessary to clear the atmosphere of old ways of thinking that keep us from fully experiencing the next seasons of our lives. The oppressive heat of summer and the bitter cold of winter cause us to retreat within ourselves for rest, renewal, and creativity.
Go With the Flow
The flow of life is a process of change. We must learn to accept the process and go with it. There's no stopping it anyway.

Sometimes the challenges we encounter seem like dark tunnels, yet every tunnel has a light at the end of it. As we grope in the darkness, we can focus on the faint light we see in the distance. This light represents the gift—whatever it is we are to learn, to heal, or to change. The darkness will pass as we move toward the light, as we gratefully receive the tunnel's gift.

Nothing in life is static for long. As the late Unity minister and teacher Eric Butterworth often said, the process of life is “grow and go.” As soon as we grow to the next higher level in our evolutionary consciousness, it is time to go to the next level. And on and on we grow and go—unless we resist.

When crisis comes, resistance is the normal first response. It's self-protective, yet in the long run, it becomes self-destructive. With every crisis comes a choice—to resist or to accept, to respond in fear or in faith, to say yes or no.

If we remember that there is a gift in every crisis or challenge—in every transition of life—we will be able to go with the flow more easily. As we discover the gift in every season, we learn to trust that loving, divine purpose behind it. Then the current of life can carry us off to new adventures, more rewarding and exciting than any we may have chosen in a resistant state of mind.

Stages of Transition
In his book Finding Yourself in Transition, Unity minister and teacher Robert Brumet explains the three distinct stages we all tend to go through in every major transition. Each one begins with an Ending—something or someone we must let go of before we can begin anew. After an Ending comes the Void—a time of grief, disorientation, and eventually acceptance of the change. Then we're ready for the New Beginning itself.

As with the seasons of nature, these stages cannot be rushed and they require whatever time it takes to pass through them and to receive their gifts.

Practical Steps
Robert Brumet offers 10 practical steps to help us through what is undoubtedly the most difficult stage of transition: the Void.

1. “The quickest way through the Void is to embrace each experience fully ... and then let it go.”
2. “If possible, avoid making any major decisions or long-term commitments.”
3. “Don't attempt to rush your process or force anything to happen. Accept each day as it comes.”
4. “Pray and meditate for regular periods each day.”
5. “Trust in God. ... your own inner Wisdom.”
6. “Take care of yourself physically. ... Eat wholesome meals; exercise regularly; get plenty of rest.”
7. “Pay attention to your dreams. ... Keep a dream journal.”
8. “Keep a daily journal. Record your primary thoughts, feelings, insights, and experiences each day.”
9. “Develop a support system. ... a counselor, friends, family, and/or a support group.”
10. “Create some type of ritual to symbolize your passage from the old life to the new.”

The Eye of the Storm
We all prefer our life changes to occur smoothly and naturally. But when they come at us with all the force of a perfect storm, we can remember that these are intense opportunities for transformation. If we respond to each
storm from the “eye” of God's presence within, where perfect peace and wisdom dwell, we will emerge even stronger, wiser, and freer than before. We will be transformed.

Affirmation:
I live in the presence of God and in a time of peace, love, and order. I trust God for right answers to be revealed in the right time and way.

“Strong communities are characterized by sincere friendliness and the ability to pursue shared objectives quickly and efficiently. The strength of a community depends on the commitment of its individual members to live by the shared values.

You can see from this quote why core values are important and what benefits are gained in a spiritual community from explicitly stating core values and living and working with these core values in consciousness. Some examples of core values are:

- Abundance
- Compassionate
- Courageous
- Creative
- Enthusiastic
- Flexible
- Generous
- Grateful
- Inclusive
- Integrity
- Joy / Joyous
- Love / Loving
- Open / Open-minded
- Playful
- Spirit-Led / Spirit-Filled
- Spiritual / Spirituality
- Stewardship
- Service
- Transformation
- Truthful
- Wise
- Whole (Wholeness, Holistic)
This Lent:

FAST from worry ....................... FEAST on God’s word
FAST from complaining .............. FEAST on appreciation
FAST from discontent .................. FEAST on gratitude
FAST from anger ....................... FEAST on forgiveness
FAST from idle gossip ............... FEAST on deep purposeful silence
FAST from judging others .......... FEAST on the Christ within
FAST from self-concern .............. FEAST on compassion for others
FAST from suspicion ................... FEAST on the trustworthiness of people
FAST from the inconsequential... FEAST on the essential
FAST from discouragement .......... FEAST on hope
FAST from problems that overwhelm FEAST on God-given opportunities
FAST from feeling alone............. FEAST on God’s loving presence
FAST from negatives ................. FEAST on affirmatives
FAST from problems that overwhelm FEAST on God-given opportunities
FAST from feeling alone............. FEAST on God’s loving presence
FAST from negatives ................. FEAST on affirmatives
THE TRIDUUM: THE ENTIRE CULMINATION OF THE LITURGICAL YEAR!

The Easter Triduum - the three days beginning Holy Thursday evening - is one feast and is the entire culmination of the liturgical year. We cannot think of one of these days out of the context of the other two. We hold the pain and death of Good Friday while mindful of the new life of Easter; we celebrate the new life of Easter mindful of its source - the death of Good Friday. We enter these days reminded that we are not pretending to be “there when they crucified my Lord.” These events we celebrate are present tense, not some ancient happening. God is either healing our wounds, giving us bread for our journey and overcoming death or God is doing nothing at all for us. We are looking not for a return from the dead of Jesus’ part; but for someone to roll away the stone and open a whole new way of life for us. We don’t need a past hero, but someone to open up the present and future for us; to show us possibilities now and into our future. On our own, facing our deaths and struggles, we see no path, no sense to what we experience. But if the stone were rolled back, we might see new life and transformation possible for us.

Holy Thursday: Mass of the Lord’s Supper
First Reading: Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14
The Exodus account of the Passover tradition reminds us of the exit, the liberation, of the people in slavery in Egypt, and the meal that commemorates it. During our Lenten journey we have desired greater freedom, and deeper liberation from the patterns that keep us from being free. (Has Lent been transforming for me? How so?)
Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 11:23-36
“This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” The gift and the mandate. Our celebration on Holy Thursday will show us how to proclaim the meaning of the Lord’s gift to us.
Gospel: John 13:1-15
John’s Gospel is a puzzle and a revelation. The account of the Last Supper in this gospel does not include the narrative Paul gives, us as do the accounts in Mark, Matthew and Luke. In this account, Jesus washes his disciples’ feet. By his action Jesus says, here I am as servant for you, do this in memory of me. (Am I resistant to washing or healing or saving? How difficult is it for me to love certain others?)

Good Friday: Celebration of the Lord’s Passion
We enter in silence. We don’t need a “gathering rite.” It is as though we have been “gathered” since the night before. In today’s readings, Isaiah (52:13-53:12) describes the coming persecution of Jesus. Paul’s letter to the Hebrews (4:14-16; 5:7-9) stresses the salvation that comes from obedience to Christ, and John (18:1-19:42) gives us the traditional narrative of Christ’s Passion. The messages in the readings confirm God’s love for us. Think about all the gifts that God has given us, gives us, and will continue to give us. He finds us each and every moment of each day, despite our not finding Him. (If all this is the case, why have any worries? With the Passion of Good Friday and the hope of the Easter Resurrection, why are the every day challenges of life so anxiety-producing? Why is it so easy to forget that God is continually at our side?)

The Easter Vigil
The Easter Vigil liturgy in majestic scriptural proclamations formally review’s God’s blessings to our planet from the blessings of creation to the blessings of salvation history to the blessing of Jesus. We also recall our personal participation in these blessings, the participation in this newness of life that began with our baptism into Jesus. This is the evening we also celebrate the Sacraments of Initiation with our Elect and Candidates.
The readings from the Hebrew Scriptures (Genesis 1:1-2:2; Exodus 14:13-15:1; Isaiah 55:1-11) recall the great events of God’s saving power. Paul (Romans 6:3-11) invites us to recall the most important day of our lives, the day we were formally inserted into Christ through baptism. “Are you unaware that we who were baptized in Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life.
Gospel: Luke 24:1-12 “Why do you seek the living one among the dead. He is not here, but he has been raised.” (How do I approach the tomb? Fearfully? Skeptically? Do I believe what Jesus has promised us?) This is the moment of truth. It comes down to this. Either we believe that Jesus died, was buried and rose again, or we don’t really or fully believe. There is no middle ground. Jesus calls us to enter the tomb ourselves, not to lie cold, still and dead, but to see the wonders of the promise of salvation. We have walked these forty days of Lent with Christ, the fulfillment of our journey is at hand. Let’s not hide our faces or cower in fear. Jesus has faced the fear and darkness for us. Death has no grip. Let us enter the tomb wide-eyed and prepare to be amazed. Christ is risen!
Matthew 9:20-22

20 Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. 21 She said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed."

22 Jesus turned and saw her. "Take heart, daughter," he said, "your faith has healed you." And the woman was healed from that moment.

Find a quiet place where you can be alone and undisturbed for a period of time.

Say a brief prayer acknowledging the presence of God as you enter into prayer and ask for the grace to be open to being touched by God.

Read the text a couple of times slowly and take in the event that the text is relating: What is happening? How does the action unfold? Who are the people involved? How do they feel? What is the general mood of the crowd? What is occurring? How is Jesus involved?

Put the text away. Now with your imagination, see the dramatic action of the scene unfold, as if you were witnessing the event as an outside observer. Pay close attention to what is happening for Jesus.

Next, put yourself in the scene. Imagine yourself being drawn into the scene — using all of your senses. Imagine Jesus calling you over. How does Jesus look upon you? What does he say? What do you hear? What does he do? Allow whatever happens to resonate within your being…. Stay with whatever is there for you.

As the time of prayer comes to a close, allow yourself to leave the scene slowly. Take with you what has happened between you and God. Perhaps, close with words of thanksgiving or by praying the Our Farther.