



Charting the Course: Forming the Parish as a Community of Small Communities

Core Community Meeting

Aim

To provide an opportunity—through prayer, reflection, presentation of information, and sharing for participants to grow in their understanding and appreciation of the following:

- The pastoral direction of the parish, as a community made up of many small communities, is a way of being Church that is radically rooted in Christian tradition
- When implemented, the pastoral direction leads parishioners to be actively involved in the mission of Jesus
- Planning is essential to the development of small Christian communities
- The Core Community is key in developing small Christian communities and the parish as a community of many small communities; a deepening awareness and knowledge of the life, ministry, and responsibilities of the Core Community is very important

Leader's Instructions:

Have the aim of the session written on newsprint or on an overhead (**Overhead 1**). Take a moment to review the aim so that participants have a clear understanding of what to expect during the session.

This session provides two Leader's Reflections and small group sharing opportunities. The first is a reflection on planning in the context of the gospel; the second reflects on the Core Community's responsibilities in light of this gospel. If having two reflections overloads this meeting, the Core may prefer a second meeting emphasizing the second reflection and group sharing.

After the reading from Scripture, distribute **Handout 1 (Part One)**, "Reflect and Share." Ask the group to spend two or three minutes in quiet reflection. Form groups of three for sharing.

Opening Prayer

Leader

Let us join together in prayer, entering more deeply into the presence of God. (*Pause*) Be still and let go of whatever tension you are holding in your body. (*Pause*) Open your heart and mind to receive God's Word.

Reading Luke 10:1–20

Leader's Reflection—1

It is certainly a challenge to find a gospel passage on the topic of planning, let alone its details! This text of Luke is perhaps one of the closest we will find. Let's take a moment to reflect on what is packed into this enlightening and provocative commissioning of the seventy disciples, and on what it might tell us about charting our own course.

Three important notions emerge from the text: first, the commissioning, which includes the attitudes and understandings the disciples need to bring with them (v. 1–16); second, the carrying out of an apostolic action; and third, the return of the disciples from their ministry, their sharing, and debriefing (v. 17–20).

Jesus' commissioning has a clarity about it; it shows a defining thought process. The disciples are sent in pairs; they are to carry nothing extra with them and greet no one on the road. These are specific, intentional prescriptions. So also is, "Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!'" (v. 5) Jesus gives further instructions about eating and drinking, curing the sick, and proclaiming the kingdom of God.

As Jesus instructs, he also motivates: "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few...whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me" (v. 2, 16).

The disciples go forth and do their ministry of preaching, healing, and teaching, as they do throughout the gospel.

Upon return, they share excitedly and debrief their experience with Jesus. Notice how he takes the opportunity to further affirm and motivate them: "See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you" (v. 19). And again he instructs them how to interpret (discern) their "success" in ministry (v. 20).

Can we find here the seeds for our own planning process, our own charting, as Core Community? We, too, need to have an effective planning process with goals and objectives. We need to experience our own commissioning and recommissioning; we need to commission and re-commission our small community leaders, motivating and energizing them. We, too, must evaluate, affirm, and motivate again!

Reflect and Share

Handout 1

- Reflect for a few minutes upon the process of the disciples: their commissioning, ministry, and evaluating. Imagine yourself carrying through this process, as they did, with Jesus. Be attentive to what you feel and think. Join with two others and share this experience.
- Think of how you might share this process with the small Christian communities, and especially the small community leaders. Share this experience.

Concluding Prayer

Leader

Jesus, our leader and motivator, help us to follow you in your process of planning, commissioning and evaluating, and in this way to be of valuable service to others. Amen.

Leader's Instructions:

It is essential for the Core Community to remember that the pastoral direction of the parish as a community made up of many small communities is not a parish activity or program. The Core must understand that this is a way of being Church that is radically rooted in Christian tradition.

Leader's Reflection—2

In today's gospel reflection and sharing, we note that Jesus follows an effective process of commissioning that is based on a plan, ministerial action, and the evaluation of that action. This is done to carry out his goal of evangelizing those who would receive the words and actions of his disciples. We also note how frequently he motivates and affirms his disciples. He clearly grasps the need his disciples have in perceiving the benefits of their actions.

The Core Community must grasp how the pastoral direction of the parish as a community of many small communities is a goal that leads to concrete and specific planning in the parish, just as Jesus' goal of evangelizing led him and his disciples into a process of planning, acting, and evaluating.

They must also see how this pastoral direction can be beneficial to the parish. Some of these benefits include the following:

- The parish that develops as a community of many small communities provides a structure that invites more active participation of the laity in the life of the parish.
- In small communities, people are nourished in their relationship with God and come to realize more deeply that they are indeed the people of God. In such an environment, people find the support they need to live their faith and reach out in service to others.
- The parish that becomes a community of many small communities provides a structure that allows for a new means of effectiveness. With a broader base of leadership, that is, small community leaders, the parish staff can do its work more effectively by reaching out to these leaders who, in turn, minister to those in their small communities.
- This new structure of the parish also provides an excellent system for communication. Messages and information can be communicated more quickly and effectively through the leaders of small communities.

The Core Community consists of parishioners who assume the primary responsibility for the ministry of small community development. This Core Community implements the pastoral direction of the parish as a community of many small communities.

As we reflect on who we are as a Core Community and on our privileges and responsibilities, let us also recommit ourselves to a process of planning, motivating, and evaluating.

Personal Response

Leader's Instructions:

Distribute **Handout 1 (Part Two)** and **Handout 2** that describe the role of the Core Community and its responsibilities.

- Ask participants to reflect quietly on these descriptions and to share with another person how they see them in the light of Jesus' commissioning his disciples.
- How does planning assist them in carrying out their role and responsibilities and in the pastoral direction of the parish?

Business Meeting Agenda

1. Review previous meeting's minutes and actions.
2. Possible actions to further this topic with small Christian communities and the wider parish includes the following:
 - Initiate opportunities for ongoing communication with parish and parish staff regarding the benefits of establishing or maintaining small Christian communities within the parish.

- Consult with RENEW International regarding the presentation of this topic in the parish. (Contact Mike Fabian at SCCServices@renewintl.org, or (908) 769-5400)
 - Consider downloading the RENEW International workshop on *Charting the Course: Forming the Parish as a Community of Small Communities* (see: www.ParishLife.com).
 - What are additional ways to assist the parish in charting the course? Which of these ways would be best?
3. Assign tasks to individual members or groups.
 4. Other action items to be discussed as part of normal business of the Parish Core Community.

Closing Prayer

Leader

Jesus prayed for the disciples:

“I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:20–21).

Pause for a moment of silence.

United in mind and heart, let us lift our voices in prayer. Our Father...



Part One: Reflection and Sharing

1. Reflect for a few minutes upon the process of becoming disciples: their commissioning, ministry, and evaluating. Imagine yourself carrying through this process, as they did, with Jesus. Be attentive to what you feel and think. Join with two others and share this experience.

2. Think of how you might share this process with the small Christian communities, and especially the community leaders. Share this experience.

Part Two: Description of a Parish Core Community

The Core Community is a group of eight to twelve people who come together to form community themselves and to carry out the ministry of fostering the development of small communities in the parish.

In developing the parish as a community of communities, the Core Community plans and implements seasonal small groups, fosters the incorporation of five elements of community [prayer, learning, sharing, mutual support, mission] in the various parish groups, committees, ministries, and organizations, and initiates, encourages, and supports the development of small Christian communities.¹

¹ Excerpt from *Small Christian Communities: A Vision of Hope for the 21st Century, Revised and Updated* by Thomas A. Kleissler, Margo A. LeBert, and Mary C. McGuinness. Copyright © 1997 by RENEW International. Used by permission of Paulist Press. www.paulistpress.com, p. 136.



Responsibilities of the Core Community

Growing Together as a Community

- Incorporates the five elements of community growth community [prayer, learning, sharing, mutual support, mission] into their meetings and way of life.
- Prays and reflects on the pastoral direction of the parish as a community of communities and discerns its implications for the parish.

Developing a Climate of Acceptance

- Presents the pastoral direction to various groups in the parish, e.g. through a parish process of listening and planning.

Planning

- Establishes goals and objectives for the development of seasonal small groups, ministerial communities, and small Christian communities in the parish and coordinates these with other parish ministries.
- Plans and coordinates seasonal small group experiences.
- Plans formation experiences for small groups and small group leaders.
- Plans, guides and encourages existing small groups, ministerial communities, and small Christian communities to incorporate the elements of Christian community in their meetings.

Developing Leaders

- Coordinates recruitment efforts for new leaders of small groups and small communities.
- Plans and coordinates training for small group/community leaders.
- Provides continuing support for small community leaders.

Providing Materials

- Coordinates and develops resources for use in small groups/communities.

Coordinating Activity

- Sponsors occasions that will bring small group/community members together for large group experiences.
- Ensures small communities relate closely to parish RCIA efforts.

Pastoral Gathering

- Fosters the growth and development of all the small communities through encouraging, tending to, challenging, developing, and nourishing growth with leaders and small communities themselves.

Communicating

- Maintains good communication with parish staff, council, and other groups working in the area of community building.
- Encourages good communication among parish small communities.
- Communicates the work of the Core Community to parishioners through appropriate channels.

Evaluating

1. Evaluates progress of parish small communities and encourages continuing evaluation.
2. Participates in a yearly goal setting and evaluation session of the Core Community.¹

¹ Thomas A. Kleissler, Margo A. LeBert, and Mary C. McGuinness, *Small Christian Communities: A Vision of Hope for the 21st Century*, Revised and Updated (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), p. 56. Handout #9.