



## Creating Ministerial Communities

### *What the Small Communities Need to Know*

1. It is good to begin with a working definition of ministerial community, which is "a face-to-face gathering of approximately five to twelve people who meet on a regular basis with the common purpose of growing together in their faith life and supporting one another in a particular outreach or ministry."<sup>1</sup> Having a particular ministry in common can give parish groups a clear purpose and direction, but the task at hand can also overshadow the goals of growing in faith and offering mutual support grounded in the person of Jesus. Ministry groups experiencing a lack of mutual support may want to move toward ministerial community, not only for the sake of strengthening their relationships, but also for the sake of more fruitful ministry.
2. Small Christian community members can play a big part in promoting the vision, understanding, and appreciation of ministerial community. Small Christian communities can have confidence in applying their experiences with faith sharing, mutual support and prayer to the gatherings of working ministry groups, social organizations, and enrichment groups in the parish. As members of these parish organizations they can contribute a few paragraphs from a relevant book, a prayer, or a Scripture passage during a meeting. They can initiate faith sharing during informal conversations before and after a meeting. They can invite others to visit their small Christian community meetings as a way of considering this kind of community.
3. It is good to be aware of the issues people will face when parish groups decide to move toward ministerial community. The previous goals of these groups will be challenged by this decision and some uncomfortable feelings may surface. This is normal. In our society at large we do not usually mix "work" and spirituality, so we are advocating something revolutionary when promoting ministerial community. During the transition to ministerial communities, you can offer support by asking what individuals and groups enjoy about being together and what their dreams are for the people they serve. The visions behind community and ministry are compatible, but may need renegotiating.
4. In the document, *Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium*, the U.S. Catholic bishops explain that serving God as lay people involves four calls: the call to holiness, the call to community, the call to mission, and the call to Christian maturity.<sup>2</sup> Parish ministerial communities can be like greenhouses on the edge of a farm and meetings can become opportunities for accelerated growth in community, holiness, maturity, and mission as members share both faith and ministry together. Imagine how much stronger ministry groups can be through prayer, faith sharing, learning, and mutual support!
5. The bishops also invite us "to make an explicit connection between holiness and service."<sup>3</sup> The bishops remind us that the "presence [of the laity] within the web of society can be a source of solace and strength in the face of enormous human need. The laity are 'the front lines of the Church's life.'"<sup>4</sup> Ministerial communities and individuals can be real signs of God's reign.

6. Existing ministry groups and seasonal faith-sharing groups who would like to move toward being ministerial communities may want to consider adopting a specific phase of a parish ministry on a trial basis. The talents and the interests of the people in the group would be a good starting point, as the group determines for which ministry it will volunteer. By way of example, one parish group "adopted" a young adult and prepared him for confirmation over a seven-month period. Another group became regular visitors in one wing of a local nursing home since one member was already a eucharistic minister there.
7. Talk with parish and/or (arch)diocesan staff for additional ideas on the topic. Also, there is a workshop on "Creating Ministerial Communities" that can be downloaded from [www.Parishlife.com](http://www.Parishlife.com).

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpt from *Small Christian Communities: A Vision of Hope for the 21<sup>st</sup> 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](http://www.paulistpress.com), p. 94.

<sup>2</sup> National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium*, (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1995), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Excerpt from *Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium*, © 1995, United States Catholic Conference, Inc., Washington, DC, p. 8. Used with permission. All rights reserved. No portion of this work may be reproduced by any means without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.