



Gatherings

Definitely the Glue: Formation and Support of Pastoral Facilitators



By Peg Paffini, St. Dominic,
Southington

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The Care and Feeding of Pastoral Facilitators



By Vicky Miller, Our Lady of the
Lakes, New Milford

When we began work on the development of small church communities at Our Lady of the Lakes in 1991, we had only a beginning sense of what we were doing. We started with a group of us willing to serve as a core team attending one of Fr. Art Baranowski's two and a half-day workshops. The workshop was held at Mary, Our Queen parish in Plantsville. Rather than drive back and forth from New Milford, we stayed at a hotel in Plantsville. This turned out to be an important bonding experience for the team. [More...](#) →

Worth Repeating

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: A Pastoral Plan for Adult Faith Formation in the U.S. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops

Definitely the Glue: Formation and Support of Pastoral Facilitators

By Peg Paffini, St. Dominic,
Southington

This essay and a later one in this issue of Gatherings by Vicky Miller were originally talks given at the May meeting of Alliance parish core teams. The Alliance is presently comprised of about a dozen parishes that have done intensive core team development over the course of the past four years. These core teams meet three times a year to resource each other. This past May the theme for the

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The Called to be Church vision for parish aims to create small church communities as a structure for parish to help people help each other to make connections between life and faith. This effort is a journey, a continuing journey. As each leg is finished, there seems to be a dawning, an awakening, a glimpse of what is evolving. At no other time has that been more evident than right now - as we support our pastoral liaisons. The pastoral liaison serves as a link person. He/she helps to connect the small communities to each other and to

Gatherings...

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Called to Be Church Workshop

Five parishes that have been hard at work over the past year and a half to form core teams will be coming together from October 24-26 to participate in the Called to Be Church workshop offered by the National Alliance of Parishes Restructuring into Communities. These parishes are: St. Thomas, Southington; St. Catherine, West Simsbury; St. Michael, Hartford; St. Mary, Newington and Immaculate Heart of Mary, Harwinton. Fr. Art Baranowski (Archdiocese of Detroit) will return yet again as a presenter. He will be joined this time by Fr. Michael Schneller (Archdiocese of New Orleans). Parishes whose core teams have previously participated in the workshop will also be sending some of their members for a booster shot.

Core Team Development

A phone call is all that it takes to bring Bro. Bob Moriarty, S.M. to your parish to assist with identifying and forming a parish core team. Check our website: www.sccquest.org for information on process help that is available. Click on Vision; then click on Identifying a Core Team: A Pastor Takes the Plunge with Help of the Diocesan Resource Person. You will find there a detailed description of the two stage process to help a parish to identify a leadership group to implement a vision for strengthening the parish as a

past May the theme for the meeting was working with pastoral facilitators.

He/she helps to connect the small communities to each other and to the parish as a whole. These people are the most important part of the vision. They are the glue. In our experience, they are what brings and holds it all together. So it's not surprising, then, that choosing, training and supporting these people is paramount.

How did I come to this conclusion? A little background might help. It seems so very long ago. Could it only be three years ago that our core team was established at Saint Dominic's? We spent so many, many months, with the help of Brother Bob, reading, discussing, dissecting and debating; focusing on the idea of doing church differently with small church communities. We attended seminars, conferences, workshops, watched videos; trying to get the vision. During this process we also read, *Creating Small Church Communities* by Fr. Art Baranowski. As a core team, we did a beginning small group experience to develop a sense of belonging. We used the resource that we would eventually use with new small groups in the parish. This program is called, *Come As You Are*.

Once, we as a core team, felt comfortable with the vision, we extended a parish-wide invitation to introduce the concept of small church communities. We did this in many different ways. With the number of people who inquired, we began putting together our groups. Our focus was diversity, whenever possible. Most often, it was people's choices of day and time that were the determining factors in composing the groups. As each group formed, one or two core team members attended the first few sessions. Our initial concern was to answer questions and to support the facilitator for that particular evening. At the same time, we had an eye out for who might eventually serve as pastoral facilitator. The *Come As You Are* program is structured so that each member takes a turn in facilitating the meetings. Thus, the responsibility for the life of the group is shared by all. The eventual pastoral facilitator (link person) would first have been a real group member, participating and learning like everyone else.

The actual pastoral facilitator selection process began after the phase one, *Come As You Are* experience. The core team took a direct hand in that decision. We discussed qualities that we felt were vital for an effective pastoral liaison. That person should be a good listener, grounded in their faith and affirming. He/she would need to be someone with an ability to make people feel at ease and have a love and concern for the church on all levels. And, at the same time, we knew that this person need not be the most articulate, the most outspoken or the most obvious leader. A pastoral liaison should help the members relate to each other and ensure an environment where all the members take responsibility for the others. A pastoral liaison facilitates communication and helps tie the small community to the larger parish. (Even with a pastoral facilitator in the community, members still take turns leading the community's sessions.)

Having determined the criteria, we asked each of the prospective pastoral facilitators that we identified to come to a meeting so that we might explore with them what their small groups could become and how they might be part of that. From the outset, we asked them for a commitment of six evenings.

The training began. Our formation guide for training the pastoral facilitators was Fr. Art Baranowski's, *Pastoring the Pastors*. This was an easy to follow, step by step guide that included agendas, activity sheets, and handouts. The program included a total of six topics: 1.) Church, Our Experience; 2.) Church: What It Is and What It Can Become; 3.) PFs: How they Fit In; 4.) Parish: a Total Vision; 5.) Prayer: the Essential Ingredient, 6) A Next Step

Because the potential pastoral facilitator group was small, they numbered four, and this was our first exposure to training, we decided, as a core team, to participate fully with the pastoral facilitators in the process. The core team members divided each session up into sections, so that we would all share in the responsibility of the presentation; that way no one person would be overwhelmed or burdened. This particular method seemed to be very beneficial. We all brainstormed; we all learned together; sharing different ideas and viewpoints. There was never an impression that anyone held all the answers. We learned from each other, sharing our faith and our faith stories. As with the gatherings of small church communities, the training was held in a casual setting. Core team members took turns hosting in their homes. We were truly building community! At the end of the six evenings, as was suggested by Fr. Art, we asked for a final commitment from the prospective pastoral facilitators. They all responded positively. We felt blessed. Then, we took the next step: the retreat.

We were fortunate that one of our core team members, Sr. Ann Kane, was able to offer the home of her order, the Sisters of St. Joseph, in Norfolk, CT as our retreat spot. We had no idea how fortunate we were. What a beautiful setting: quiet and secluded. It was a large home with a chapel, large dining room, and an even larger kitchen. Everyone, including the pastoral facilitators, shared in providing meals and snacks.

whole.

Vicariate/Deanery Networking

After many years of serving as Deanery Networking Coordinator, Joan O'Loughlin (Assumption, Manchester) is retiring from that role. It will take three people to replace her. Actually, we are introducing a vicariate wrinkle to the networking process. Thus, we will still be doing networking of small Christian communities by deanery, but within the context of the three archdiocesan vicariates. Ann Sharkey (Sacred Heart, Southbury) will be the networking coordinator for the Waterbury vicariate, Gena Evans (St. Martin de Porres, New Haven) for New Haven and Suzanne Baitos (St. Catherine, West Simsbury) for Hartford. We will be conducting a Vicariate Networking Conversation here at St. Thomas Seminary on Saturday, September 21 to explore ways to make this new arrangement as effective as possible.

Joan O'Loughlin

Our thanks go with Joan as she completes her service as Deanery Networking Coordinator. She has worked conscientiously to keep small communities in touch with each other for a good number of years now. Her commitment to a vision of the parish as a community of communities is clear and always simply and joyfully articulated. Her efforts to keep us all in touch by telephone contact and by the mini-newsletter have been a great help. She will continue to be involved in our diocesan efforts, even as she now makes time to do some travelling with her husband, Jim, who recently retired from teaching. Thanks to Jim, too, for supporting Joan in the work she has been doing to

The core team followed the same format in putting on the retreat as we did for the six training sessions. We did it together. Pastoring the Pastors was again our resource. It actually contains three retreat formats. Our theme for this first retreat was, *Becoming a Bridge Builder*. We divided up the sections, following the plans in a step by step manner. Our time there seemed short. We gathered from Friday evening until Saturday evening. The overall feeling that was expressed by the pastoral facilitators was that the experience was very enriching, exhausting, but enriching. There was a great deal of dialogue, a good deal of time for personal reflection. A special bond, both spiritually and socially, was formed among us. And the experience continues!

Last, but certainly not least, a word about Fr. Henry Frascadore, our pastor. Also a core team member, Fr. Henry has embraced this vision from the very beginning. It is he who leads the monthly pastoral facilitator meetings. When they first began (in the living room of the rectory), the co-chairs of the core team participated. As time has passed, the entire core team has joined this group. Because so much of our emphasis and work is in supporting the pastoral facilitators, we felt it was a good fit. This works for us now, the group is small. We will have to wait and see what direction we take as we grow!

We are all deepening our understanding of the role of the pastoral liaison. We are all aware of the issues and concerns coming out of the small church communities. We are all connecting our life and faith at these gatherings, and we continue to support one another with our faith and, most importantly, with prayer. As we gathered at our last meeting, one of the pastoral facilitators attempted to explain the role of the pastoral facilitator in the small church community, saying, "It allows movement, growth and cohesiveness in the community." Cohesiveness is what it is all about. We're back where I began. Pastoral facilitators are the glue, connecting the small communities to each other and to the life and mission of the whole parish.

Questions for reflection and conversation

How is the formation and support of pastoral facilitators done in your parish?

How frequently do the pastoral facilitators gather for reflection on the small church community experience?

When is the next pastoral facilitator retreat planned for in your parish?

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The Care and Feeding of Pastoral Facilitators

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When we began work on the development of small church communities at Our Lady of the Lakes in 1991, we had only a beginning sense of what we were doing. We started with a group of us willing to serve as a core team attending one of Fr. Art Baranowski's two and a half-day workshops. The workshop was held at Mary, Our Queen parish in Plantsville. Rather than drive back and forth from New Milford, we stayed at a hotel in Plantsville. This turned out to be an important bonding experience for the team. During the workshop we explored the overall vision and learned some approaches and techniques for structuring a parish around small church communities. At that time the program being recommended for phase one beginning small groups was, *Free to Be Me*. When we got back to the parish our first core team meeting was devoted to evaluating the workshop and tossing around ideas about how to get started at Our Lady of the Lakes.

We decided to do the *Free to Be Me* program ourselves as a core team prior to inviting parishioners to do so. That way we would know better what we were talking about. This strengthened the core team bond that began in Plantsville. After we finished this program, our meetings concentrated on how to promote it to the parish. We had the books, the videos, the manpower, the willingness and, above all, the vision. It was time to begin.

We promoted the beginning small groups through the parish council, bulletin notices and a newsletter that was mailed to all parishioners. The newsletter included an article from each core team member. We offered an information night with a person talking about what *Free to Be Me* meant to them.

We had approximately 110 people sign up the first time. I arranged them into 12 groups

work she has been doing to promote small church communities.

Alliance Parish Core Team Meeting

Our next scheduled Alliance Parish Core Team Meeting is scheduled for Saturday morning, October 5, 2002. St. Mark (West Hartford) will be the host parish for this gathering. The focus of this Alliance meeting will be on recruitment approaches on both a near term and a year round basis.

National Joint Convocation on Small Church Communities

St. Mary's University, San Antonio was the setting for the convocation this past July 31-August 4. About six hundred people from throughout North America and from several countries throughout the world (Sweden, Scotland, Holland, Tanzania, Uganda, Australia, Brazil and Mexico) gathered to engage the theme: *Small Christian Communities, Society and Church: From Paul's Corinth to North America*. Bernard Lee, S.M. opened the convocation with reflections on the Loyola/Lilly research project on small Christian communities in the U.S. Catholic experience. The convocation as a whole was designed as an exercise of practical theology. The named concern of the convocation had to do with imagining the future of small Christian communities. Sociologist of religion, Robert Bellah (*Habits of the Heart*) laid out an analysis of the socio-cultural context we find ourselves in today. R. Scott Appleby (University of Notre Dame) assessed the ecclesial context of small communities. Robert Moriarty, S.M. did an exegetical presentation on I Corinthians as a point of entry into dialogue with the church's

We had approximately 110 people sign up the first time. I arranged them into 12 groups according to the day of the week that they wanted to meet. Our core team checked the names in each group looking for potential pastoral facilitators. We waited to choose pastoral facilitators until they were in a group. We knew we had people who wanted to be there just because they signed up. By the time they were trained they would have a group they had already formed and a relationship with the pastor.

We made a point of choosing people who weren't already involved in the parish (e.g., religious ed. teachers, people in charge of committees) to become initial facilitators. I tried to get at least one or two men/women and/or a married couple. I did not know everyone who signed up, so I tried to pay attention to comments they made or questions they asked about joining. The staff and core team are the main resource in helping choose prospective pastoral facilitators. With the core team's help we were able to choose one or two people for each group. In some cases, the selection involved a process of elimination. There is also the need to depend on the Holy Spirit. One couple that we chose still asks how we knew them.

I called the prospective initial facilitators and asked them to come to a training session to learn how to lead the first session of *Free to Be Me*. When we all gathered to meet, we had nametags and an icebreaker, a reading and discussion. During this meeting, I went over the first session in detail with them. I began the training by describing the materials and how and why they were used. I explained the importance of discussing the group agreement, the importance of making the meetings a priority, the importance of listening in the group and the role of confidentiality within the group. I offered tips on facilitating the session and an approach to encouraging another member to lead the next session.

I asked them to call everyone in their group in advance of the first meeting of the group. That saved me from making 73 calls. I asked them to be my continuing contact with the group. During this time I was hired to be the SCC Coordinator. I wondered about how they would respond to all this, but I reminded myself that they all signed up. They wanted to be part of this experience. We set the next meeting in time to hand out supplies for the next sessions. They were hesitant, but I also let them know this was just the first session that they were leading. Eventually, everyone would take his/her own turn at leading a session.

We brought the initial leaders together during the *Free to Be Me* program. We gathered with opening prayer and shared around a focus question. They we talked: How are the groups doing? The questions they had showed that something was happening. This was really the first of what would eventually become the pastoral facilitator meetings. They were supporting each other by talking about what was happening in their groups. We were flying by the seat of our pants in many ways, but we were underway. Towards the end of phase one, the contact people told me that the people were asking for more. I assured them we had something with which they could continue. When the beginning groups finished *Free To Be Me*, I offered them the follow up books, *Praying Alone and Together*. At that meeting, Fr. Tom Ptaszynski, our pastor, talked about the vision for the parish and for the future of the church and how small church communities fit in. He also invited the initial leaders to participate in 6 special training sessions to become longer-term pastoral facilitators.

Fr. Tom and I did the training sessions using Fr. Art Baranowski's, *Pastoring the Pastors*. Once again the resource book spelled everything out. We had the books; we had the directions. The prospective pastoral facilitators thought we had all the answers. Actually, we were all learning together. Using *Pastoring the Pastors* we led the prospective pastoral facilitators through the six sessions which includes reading and summarizing and discussing portions of Baranowski's book, *Creating Small Church Communities* at each training session. Fr. Tom and I led different parts of each session and the participants presented summaries of the chapters. During the training sessions we planned for the first pastoral facilitator retreat. Each of the prospective pastoral facilitators had a one-on-one meeting with Fr. Tom. They spoke about the vision, their impressions of the whole experience. They were invited to continue as a pastoral facilitator and to participate in the retreat. They all said they would continue. Upon completion of the retreat we scheduled monthly meetings with them and we met every 4 to 6 weeks. Little by little we got the vision. We may not have it all together but all together we've got it.

Meetings with pastoral facilitators are like another small church community meeting. The format for the regular meetings with the pastoral facilitators included prayer, song, conversation around the Sunday scriptures and a period of time for conversation about how the groups are doing, of course respecting appropriate confidentiality. Fr. Tom would share thoughts about things developing in the parish, church issues or anything he wanted the pastoral facilitators and their groups to know about.

As time went on, we continued to have sign-ups for new groups and recruited another group of pastoral facilitators. When it was time for their first retreat, it was time for the initial group of

great Tradition. All of this coalesced in caucuses of the various sponsoring and interest groups present to surfaces strategies and tactics to continue to promote this new way of being church. The joint convocation is a collaborative effort by the three national small Christian community organizations: Buena Vista, National Alliance of Parishes Restructuring into Communities and the North American Forum for Small Christian Communities. This time around the Loyola/Lilly project participated as a co-sponsor, while a number of other interested groups served as consultants. The convocation enjoyed a substantial Hispanic presence. The liturgies had a rich multi-cultural flavor to them.

pastoral facilitators to have their next retreat. We had the first group present the retreat to the new group. This worked well. In subsequent years, we have invited a number of people to lead a retreat for the pastoral facilitators. Fr. Tom Sas (St. Mark, West Hartford) led a retreat on the Old Testament. Fr. Joe Donnelly (St. Bridget, Manchester) did one on spirituality. And Msgr. Michael Motta (Archdiocesan Religious Education Office) presented one on themes like solitude and humor.

It takes time for everybody to catch on. When we started at Our Lady of the Lakes Fr. Tom and I did not have the full picture ourselves. We had a certain grasp on the vision, but it didn't become fully real until we worked with it for a while. Working at this vision is like carving an elephant. You know how you carve an elephant? You get a piece of marble and chip away any of the pieces that don't look like elephant. When we meet as parish council, as lectors and ushers as religious ed. teachers, we work with each other to chip away the pieces that don't look like parish. When we meet with and support your pastoral facilitators we're forming the parish by chipping away the pieces that don't look like parish. It is slow going, bit by bit. But it is not just chipping away, it is about supporting, polishing. It is really about building up. It is about making church together.

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Saint Thomas More at Yale to be Nationally Honored for Small Church Communities

Saint Thomas More Catholic Chapel & Center at Yale University has been selected as one of seven exemplary campus ministry programs to be honored for its Small Church Communities at the 2002 Campus Ministry Bishops' Reception in November.

This national award is jointly bestowed by The Catholic Campus Ministry Association, The National Association of Diocesan Directors of Campus Ministry and The National Catholic Student Coalition. Fr. Robert L. Beloin, Catholic Chaplain at Yale, will accompany two students to Washington, D.C. to receive the award on behalf of the community of Saint Thomas More Chapel at Yale.

Now in its 14th semester, SCCs at Yale involve more than 125 students and faculty who meet for 90 minutes each week. This time commitment is not trivial given the intensive course load and myriad extra-curricular activity in which Yale students are engaged. "Students are hungry for greater knowledge of their Catholic faith," Fr. Beloin explains. "They are bright and inquisitive. They yearn for a deeper and mature relationship with God. We have designed our SCCs to provide both cognitive and affective nourishment in faith. It is both inspiring and hopeful to see so many talented and intelligent young people make the development of their faith life a priority."

One of Fr. Beloin's main interests in coming to campus ministry from parish life was to adapt the Small Church Community model to campus life. Informed by NAPRC (National Alliance of Parishes Restructuring into Communities) and the Archdiocese of Hartford's Small Church Community Office, Fr. Beloin has developed SCCs at Yale very effectively. Each semester a comprehensive journal is prepared for the Yale academic calendar. It includes the first reading and the Gospel for the coming Sunday, with commentaries, as well as supplemental literature on various aspects of theology.

A happy outcome of such a vibrant and successful approach is that the Chapel is completely out of space for meetings such as these to take place. To respond to the growth of Catholic life and student participation in campus ministry, a capital campaign has been initiated to raise money for a 35,000 square foot Catholic student center to be built adjacent to the Chapel in the future.

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