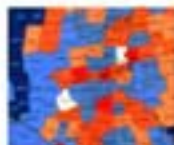




Gatherings

A Community of Communities: A Vision for the Church in Southern New England and for Connecticut Yankees At-Large



Robert K. Moriarty, S.M.

We reflect here on the mission dimension of small church communities. What's more we do so very concretely in terms of the possibilities for small church communities to engage with the recent CenterEdge initiative of the Connecticut bishops and our archdiocesan Office of Urban Affairs, along with the Connecticut Metropatterns report that prompts this state-wide Catholic initiative. But first, some context.

[More »](#)

The Basic Ecclesial Community of Eastern Indonesia (Part I)

by Father Eugene Schmitz, SVD

The small Christian community or basic community was an unexpected gift for the Catholic people of the Diocese of Larantuka in East Flores (Eastern Indonesia). In 1978 the Catholic Church of Indonesia was faced with a life-threatening dilemma. The Department of Religion under the influence of a militant Islamic group passed laws which would in fact end the presence of all foreign priests and religious in the country within 5 years. [More »](#)

Community - The Key to Survival of the Church

Paul O'Bryan (Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle, Australia)

"Developing Small Church Communities in a parish is not about developing a few nice small groups of people who want to share. It's really about building an experience of parish where people really make a difference in each other's lives, so that in the end, you have a parish that makes a difference in the world around it." If all you do, is develop a few nice small groups and leave it at that, then you've missed the point of what small church communities are all about. [More »](#)

Vicariate Networking Workshop

Small Christian Communities and Mission

Join with fellow small church community members from parishes in your vicariate for mutual support and resourcing.

We will be sponsoring three vicariate workshops in January and February that will be held Saturday mornings from 9:00am to noon.

New Haven Vicariate - January 31

St. Martin de Porres in New Haven
Gena Evans, networking coordinator
203-781-0070

Waterbury Vicariate - February 7

Sacred Heart in Southbury
Anne Sharkey, networking coordinator
203-262-1894

Gatherings...

Small Community Happenings...

Vicariate Networking

Three workshops are planned for January and February to bring together small Christian community member for mutual support and resourcing. These workshops will also serve to introduce small community members to the Connecticut Metropatterns report and the CenterEdge coalition.

Developing Core Teams

New core teams are at work with their own formation and beginning plans at St. Timothy (West Hartford) and St. Bernard (Enfield). The recently developed team at St. Bridget (Manchester) is operating in full gear! New teams will begin developing in other parishes shortly.

Alliance Parishes Gather

The next meeting of core teams from Alliance parishes will be on Saturday, January 24 from 9:00am through lunch. The core team from St. Thomas, Southington will host this gathering.

20th Anniversary Approaches

This fall will mark the 20th anniversary of the beginnings of small Christian communities in the Archdiocese of Hartford. Plans are beginning to take place for the celebration. Anticipate another festive dinner event and renowned speaker.

Africa Visits Again

Fr. Jude Shayo, A.J. from St. Michael Parish in the Archdiocese of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania visited for a few days in December. In addition to spending time with Bro. Bob Moriarty, S.M., he was also hosted by Myles Hubbard and colleagues associated with the Office for Black Catholics and by Joan O'Loughlin and members of small church communities at Assumption (Manchester). There are some 2,000 small Christian communities in the Archdiocese of Dar es Salaam and many are interested in twinning with small communities here in the states. The twinning experience is meant to be a sharing of experiences of faith, community and mission. Contact our office (860-243-9642) for more information if your small community would like to twin with a small community in East Africa.



Hartford Vicariate - February 28

St. Catherine of Siena in West Simsbury Suzanne Babes, networking coordinator 860-451-3638

Featuring Pat Wallace and Jennie Graustein of the Office of Urban Affairs, the workshop will serve to introduce small community members to the Connecticut Metropatterns report.

Worth Repeating

[T]he domain of communion (koinonia) embodies and reveals the very essence of the mystery of the church. Communion is the fruit and demonstration of that love which springs from the heart of the Eternal Father and is poured out upon us through the Spirit which Jesus gives us (cf. Rom. 5:5), to make us all 'one heart and one soul' (Acts 4:32).

John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 43.

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We reflect here on the mission dimension of small church communities. What's more we do so very concretely in terms of the possibilities for small church communities to engage with the recent CenterEdge initiative of the Connecticut bishops and our archdiocesan Office of Urban Affairs, along with the Connecticut Metropatterns report that prompts this state-wide Catholic initiative. But first, some context.

The Called to Be Church vision for parish that core teams are implementing in our parishes may be very simply expressed. We are about developing parish in such a way that it is centered on ordinary people helping each other to connect life and faith regularly. The lives of



Core team members explore one of the Connecticut Metropatterns maps at a fall meeting of Alliance parish core team members.

ordinary people are pretty hectic these days. It is common place that both spouses are working. And then there are the multiple after school activities that call for parental support and presence. Even the lives of retired seniors are crowded. The invitation to try a beginning small group experience is sometimes resisted because, at first glance, at least, it sounds like just one more activity that will crowd an already too busy life. Never mind that those who have already discovered the small community experience know that it is actually a sort of free zone, a time and setting to step back from it all and to reflect on what's really important. Ironically, the frazzled busyness of life that gives rise to the need and the desire for the small community experience is often the very thing that holds people back from taking advantage of it.

So, now, into that mix of busyness that small community members experience just like everyone else, we stir the ingredient of service, outreach or mission? ("Gimme a break! This means more time." Can't you just hear it? Actually, that is not the way small church community members I know



From left to right: Joan O'Loughlin (Assumption, Manchester), Fr. Jude Shayo, A.J. (Archdiocese of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania), Myles Hubbard (Office for Black Catholics), Bro. Bob Moriarty, S.M.

Retreats For Small Christian Communities

How often do small church communities in your parish gather for mutual enrichment? Have the small communities ever come together for a retreat? The website of the National Alliance of Parishes Restructuring into Communities offers a whole slew of ideas on doing a retreat for small communities. Explore this possibility at naprc.fathweb.com. Click on SCC Resources. You'll even find a sample retreat format.

time." Can't you just hear it? Actually, that is not the way small church community members I know respond. As a matter of fact, small community members are already among the most invested parishioners in the life and mission of the parish. Small church community members readily acknowledge that belonging, formation in faith, prayer and service (the dimensions that the adult catechumenate would name word, community, worship and witness) are the essential elements of the authentic small church community. And yet, dealing with the crunch of time and the call to mission can present real challenges.

Fidelity to the gospel calls us to the mission not only of promoting the transformation of hearts in people's coming to know Jesus as Lord, it also calls us to participation in the transformation of God's world. This is a tall order. To meet it we need to walk on the two feet of social action. We need to step out in direct service to immediate human need. We need to bring forward the other foot to promote structural and systemic change in the cause of justice and peace. We do well in the area of direct service; we need to exercise the other dimension more effectively.

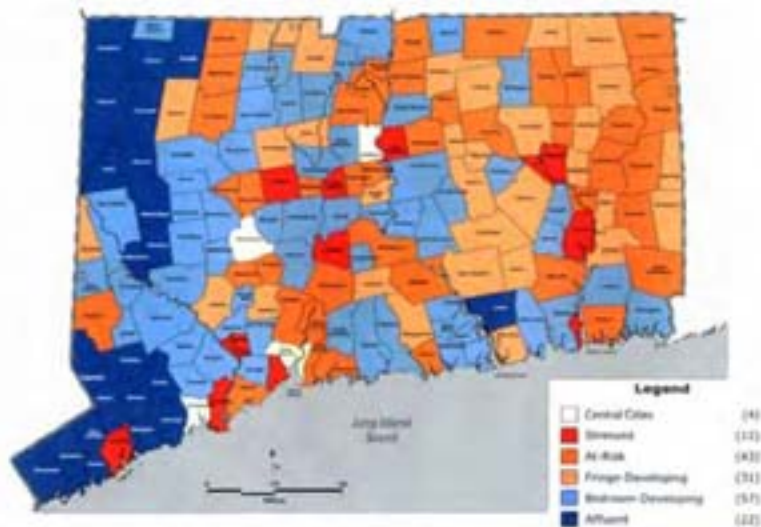
What we explore here in terms of the Connecticut Metropatterns report and the CenterEdge Coalition is an absolutely remarkable opportunity for us all to engage the large questions of justice and the promotion of the common good in the state of Connecticut. A Regional Agenda for Community and Prosperity, Connecticut



Connecticut's waters are threatened by impervious surfaces, like parking lots, that impede groundwater discharge.

Metropatterns lays out an analysis of development in the state. It makes the case that the way the state is growing is hurting all communities, from the poorest to the wealthiest. Sprawl, congestion and pollution are some of the major challenges we face. The state's 169 towns and cities can no longer afford to pursue their own development irrespective of its impact on their neighbors. When it comes to the well being of the state, it is now crystal clear that we are all in it together. All places would benefit from regional and statewide reforms to advance the common good. While the language has even deeper implications for us as a people of faith, Connecticut needs to discover itself as a community of communities. The CenterEdge Coalition is an alliance that is developing from among the religious, business, political and academic communities to bring this need to full awareness among Connecticut's citizens.

Networks of parish-based small church communities linked together across parish lines would be well-positioned to help bring people together across town lines to support and promote a regional approach to community and prosperity in Connecticut. Such an effort flows so organically from our fundamental vision of church as a community of communities at the service of the reign of God.



Common Ground, Common Good: Toward Greater Social, Economic and Environmental Justice in Connecticut is a statement issued by the Catholic bishops of Connecticut in conjunction with the publication of the *Connecticut Metropatterns* report and the inauguration of the CenterEdge Coalition. In this statement the bishops address the Catholic religious and moral vision that underpins this whole initiative. The bedrock grounding principle is a profound concern for the life and dignity of the human person. Issuing as we do from the creative hand of God, every person is sacred. And human life is not only sacred, it is intrinsically social. Sons and daughters of the one God, each of us is brother or sister to each other. Fidelity to our God and to all of God's creation then, calls us to fidelity to each other, to the promotion of the common good, including the well being of the water, land and air.

This fundamental perspective is then, further - indeed immeasurably - enriched by our whole Christian sensibility and, specifically, by our vision of what small church communities are about. This sensibility and vision is caught in the basic scriptural images that depict us as branches in the one Vine; as members of the one body of Christ. John Paul II speaks of the church as a mystery of communion, a mystery rooted in the life of the Trinity as communion. Not content to stay within itself, the Trinity is a mystery of communion that overflows into mission. We experience this mission as creation, redemption, inspiration. Made in the image and likeness of our God, personally and corporately as church, we are called to be full participants in this mystery of communion that overflows into mission. Our experience of communion with one another in faith is meant to overflow into solidarity with humanity all about us. Our task, says, John Paul, is nothing less than that of building "a civilization of love." Even as we think globally, we need to act locally. In the context of these reflections, acting locally means acting regionally in Connecticut, personally, as parish/diocese, as small church communities networked for impact on the common good.



Parish core team members from around the Archdiocese talk about the implications of the *Connecticut Metropatterns* report.

The Connecticut bishops are inviting all Catholics and all citizens to learn about what the *Connecticut Metropatterns* report reveals and to consider its proposals as a regional agenda for community and prosperity in Connecticut. They call on us "to contribute to the discussion that we hope will take place in every town hall, around every kitchen table, in every church, mosque and synagogue, in every chamber of commerce and union hall in our state."

What can all this mean for us in small Christian communities? I proceed here mindful of what I said at the outset about the busyness of our lives and the



the cubist about the busyness of our lives and the pressures of time we all feel. Embracing the social justice implications of our Christian mission is not something any one of us can accomplish alone. Neither is it something any small church community can do alone. The good news is we can only really do it together. And when we do it together synergy is the result. The combined energy of individuals, small church communities and parishes - in league with diocesan efforts and linked with others in the business, political, academic, ecumenical and interfaith communities can achieve what we need to do for the common good.



The problems associated with concentrated poverty discourage investment in poor neighborhoods.

In collaboration with our archdiocesan Office of Urban Affairs, the Pastoral Department for Small Christian Communities is helping to introduce the Connecticut Metropatterns report and the CenterEdge Coalition to small church communities throughout the archdiocese. In fact, we have already begun. The fall meeting of Alliance parish core teams was devoted entirely to this effort. In January and February we will be conducting three vicariate workshops on this issue. These workshops will serve to introduce the report and the coalition to small church community members at-large. At the parish level, core teams and parish coordinators can bring this whole initiative to the attention of their small church communities. Small communities can work in league with their overall parish social ministry effort to help develop awareness among parishioners at large about the economic,



City neighborhoods offer old housing stock that can be attractively renovated, like these homes in Hartford.

social and environmental challenges we face in Connecticut and what we can do about them - together. Acting as citizens and as people of faith through their parishes, small community members, individually and corporately, can bring the need to develop a regional agenda for the common good to awareness among town officials, business leaders and citizens at-large in their area. In time, small church communities networked with one another within their parishes and across parish lines can play an important contributing role in bringing citizens together across town lines in their area to work for the good of all.

To begin we need to learn about the findings of the Connecticut Metropatterns report. For those online, you will find a great deal of valuable information on the website of the Office of Urban Affairs: www.oua-act.org. Copies of the report and a number of other resources are available that can be used at the parish level for mutual education. OUA staff specialists are also available to do information programs at parishes. I encourage you to invite OUA staff (203-777-7279) to meet with small community members and parishioners in general to explore this effort to promote the common good. Who better to be about the work of promoting the vision of "a community of communities" for southern New England than members of small church communities?

Questions for reflection and conversation

- What do you like about the town/city where you live?
- What concerns you about your town/city?
- How does your experience of small church community spill over into the rest of your life - at home, at work, in your parish, in the way you relate to your neighborhood, town or city?

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