



Gatherings

Winter 2007

Gatherings...

Fading Friends...

Clarence Page

Feeling socially marooned? You're not alone. Social fragmentation is on the rise, experts say. We Americans have more ways to connect to one another in the Internet age, yet we report fewer close friends.

Researchers at Duke and the University of Arizona say the number of true confidants that Americans say they have has dropped on average since the 1980s from about three to about two. And about a fourth say they have no confidants at all outside of their families. That's twice the percentage of two decades ago...

Kisközösség

Robert K. Moriarty, S.M.

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Worth Repeating

God is communion; he is communion because he is love, and being love he cannot help but be communion. We bear in our roots this reality of God who is communion... thus giving life to the Church.... This is also the way that the Church is born in every parish. The Church in every parish contains this mystery of God who is communion...because he is love."

John Paul II, in L'Ossessore Romano, March 4, 1990
as quoted in The Parish Community, Fr. Adolfo Raggio,
ed.

Fading Friends. . .

Clarence Page

(Editor's note: Small church community is certainly about much more than finding friends. So, what, one might inquire, is the essay that follows doing in Gatherings? We offer it as food for thought about the impact our age has on the need to re-weave the ties that bind, i.e. the challenge we face in building community in general and small church communities in particular. We yearn for community and at the same time, given the individualism of the age, we resist it. Small church



Small Community

Happenings...

Gatherings Article: Process!

For some time now, we have been deliberate about including brief articles in Gatherings that lend themselves to ongoing formation for core teams, pastoral facilitators and small communities at large. We have accompanied these essays with questions for reflection and conversation. We encourage you to read these articles individually and then take some time in the groups mentioned for critical conversation about them. Feedback on the usefulness of the articles we are including or suggestions about topics you would find helpful are most welcome.

Core Team Development

New parishes continue to explore the core team identification process. St. Thomas, Thomaston, is slated to begin the extended process in the early part of the year. Others are in the wings.

Called to Be Church Workshop

Shortly, we will be scheduling the Called to Be Church workshop for four core teams that have been in the process of basic formation for some time now. Fr. Art Baranowski will once again be on hand to conduct this workshop.



communities surely need to be attentive to the occupational hazard of being no more than self-nurturing cocoons or lifestyle enclaves. Nevertheless, Clarence Page's essay lays out some of the context that underlies the fact that the desire for community is one of the basic motivations that draws people to the small community experience. We hope its presence here invites reflection on the situation of life in which we are all immersed today. We hope as well that it prompts a deeper acknowledgment that the ties that bind in small church community, ties grounded in our being members of one body in Christ, call us to solidarity in thought, feeling, prayer and action on behalf of all of God's wounded to whom we are likewise bound.)

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It's not hard to imagine why. Friendships are built over time, and increasingly we don't have enough. The world has speeded up, and so have we.

Our families are busier. Our kids are overscheduled. We have less time than we once did to cultivate a nice circle of friends. It's the great paradox of the Internet age: The more connected we are to the world, the less we get to know each other.

Like the chatty people you used to meet while standing in line for something, chances are they're too busy to meet you now, too busy chatting on their cell phones with someone far away standing perhaps in some other line.

We still turn to our families, the authors of the Duke study say, but our family members are increasingly scattered across the American landscape. We spend more time in cars and planes to get to Grandma's house. Our children have fewer chances to know their aunts, uncles or cousins.

Small, tightly knit neighborhoods, they're so last century, man. American life is fragmented now in suburban sprawl and a couch potato culture of DVDs, cable news, video games, and lavish home entertainment systems. Who has time left for live people?

We often find new friends at work, but we're changing jobs more often than ever and making friendships shorter. It is part of the American character to be restless, always on the move, still probing new frontiers, always proud of our autonomy and self-reliance.

Robert Putnam saw much of this coming six years ago in his book, "Bowling Alone." He argued that Americans have been joining fewer and fewer clubs and civic organizations, even bowling leagues, ever since the 1960s. That was the decade when the Beatles sang about all the lonely people and asked, "Where do they all come from?"

Sounds almost pathetic today. "Where do they all belong?" Looking for love online perhaps, or, in another American innovation, the speed date, with five minutes to make a first impression and check out that certain someone before moving on to the next one.

We're not surprised then to see religion repackaged in today's new American megachurch, stadium-like cathedrals where whosoever will may come and meet a ready-made community of fellow seekers to check out before you commit, no obligation, whatever works.

conduct this workshop.

Parishes whose core teams have previously done this workshop are welcome to send members who have joined their core teams since the original team participated to be a part of this workshop. Call the office for more information if interested.

Alliance

The winter gathering of Alliance parish core teams will take place on Saturday, February 3. The meeting will be hosted by St. Dominic (Southington). Fr. Stan Kennedy, M.S. will be the featured presenter. The theme will be Reflective Reading of the Bible: Helpful Hints.

Quest Seeks Stained Glass Windows

Might you like to see the stained glass windows from your church featured in Quest artwork? Nominate your windows for consideration. A couple of years ago, we featured the windows from St. Thomas Seminary. One of the newly refurbished windows from St. James (Manchester) appears in the Spring '07 edition. Quest artist, Fr. John McHugh, deftly integrates the stained glass into the overall artistic presentation of the booklet. We would like to continue to include stained glass in the Quest artwork from time to time. Nominate your church's windows by contacting us at the office (860) 243- 9642.

Coming Up: SCCs and Asia

Fr. Jerry Proctor (United Kingdom), a recent member of

to check out before you commit, no obligation, whatever works.

"You've got to have friends," Bette Midler famously sang. Or do we? We know it's nice to have friends. Social fragmentation leads to social breakdown. Close communities have less crime, fewer problems with their children. Well-connected people live longer, the experts say, and who can argue with that?

We want connections, as soon as we find the time.

Questions for Reflection and Conversation

- How many confidants outside the family do you have?
- How much time do you devote to friendships these days?
- To what extent does your Internet use connect or separate you from others?
- How would you feel about living in a neighborhood where every house had a front porch?
- To what extent has your small church community experience led you to a deeper sense of the ties that bind us all in the larger community of parish and the world around you?

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I first learned of Háló in 1999 during the International Consultation on Small Christian Communities in Cochabamba, Bolivia. Jan Kofron (Czech Republic), a member of the European delegation, reported on the presence of small Christian communities in Eastern Europe. He spoke of Háló and its work to network Hungarian small communities both within and beyond the borders of Hungary. This past year, Fr. Jim O'Halloran (Dublin, Ireland), another member of the European delegation at Cochabamba, visited Háló in Budapest. He subsequently sent a report of his visit to Cochabamba participants with whom he was still in touch. I wrote to Háló at that point to greet them and share something of our work here in Hartford. That started a conversation that continued over the course of a year.

This past spring, András wrote to say that Háló would like to send one or two folks to connect with small Christian communities here in the states. We planned the visit together over the course of several months and he arrived here on September 29. He accompanied me to the fall board meeting of the National Alliance of Parishes Restructuring into Communities that first weekend. When we returned from Indianapolis, András was hosted for a couple of days by Joan and Jim O'Loughlin (Assumption, Manchester). Joan arranged for him to meet with various small community folk in the Manchester area. One evening was spent with a men's small community. Neal Duggan (St. Bridget, Manchester) a member of that community, reports that they very much enjoyed having András meet

Kingdom), a recent member of the Marins Team resourcing basic ecclesial communities in Latin America and in various parts of the church worldwide, was a participant this past year at the fourth international meeting of the Asian Integral Pastoral Approach (AsIPA) in India. AsIPA is the name given to the continent-wide effort to establish small Christian communities in the church in Asia. Fr. Proctor's report on this international gathering arrived recently in this office. It is a fascinating and substantive account of this conference. Gatherings will offer a summary of this report in the next issue.