

Session 5: Small Groups

Proposition Definition: Create or grow a small group ministry at every parish that fosters personal relationships, builds community and provides formation to help parishioners grow as joyful missionary disciples of Christ.

- Types: Bible study, faith sharing, prayer, sacramental preparation, evangelization
- Variety of formats and common interest groups: couples, women, men, single, mixed age, similar life stages
- Parishes may collaborate with other parishes on this ministry, as desired.

Other Key Points:

- There are three key fruits of small group ministry: establishing personal relationships, building Catholic community, and developing missionary disciples.
- Small groups foster personal relationships both inwardly among parishioners and outwardly towards those on the peripheries of our parish communities. When members are able to reveal their authentic joys, struggles, and deepest questions in a safe, positive small group, they not only grow in faith, but in deepening relationships within the Mystical Body of Christ. These deepening friendships not only give us insights into the communion shared by the three persons of the Trinity, but can also often reveal God's will for us, and call us to growing holiness.
- Small groups build community within each group, within our parishes, and within our Archdiocese. St. John Paul II envisioned parishes that didn't just have a ministry; he wrote, "One way for renewing parishes, especially urgent for parishes in large cities, might be to consider the parish as a community of communities and movements. It seems timely therefore to form ecclesial communities and groups of a size that allows for true human relationships." (JPII, *Ecclesia in America*, 1999) In this way each and every member of a community may be known; no one falls through the cracks, no one is forgotten, no one goes without the embrace of Holy Mother Church.
- Small groups provide formation that would help parishioners grow as joyful missionary disciples. When a small group emboldens each member to invite those on the outside in, small groups can act as engines for evangelization within our parishes and Archdiocese. They become proof that what we celebrate in the liturgy has entered into daily life.
- Joy is the fruit and the catalyst of these relationship-growing, community-building, missionary-disciple-making small groups. Pope Francis rightly drew a straight line between joy and evangelization when he wrote "Finally an evangelizing community is filled with joy; it knows how to rejoice always. It celebrates every small victory, every step forward." (24, EN)
- In just a little over a year, we have established Parish Evangelization Cells System, or PECS, small groups in our archdiocese; trained countless leaders; launched more than 1,800 groups in 145 of our parishes. Since Lent 2024, we have seen a 49 percent increase in small group participation!
- These groups are truly the foundation for all that comes next in our archdiocese, as it is when living and praying together that we find the courage and fortitude to go deeper in our faith.

Reflection Questions:

1. Archbishop Hebda mentions three key fruits of successful small group ministry. Have you experienced any of these personally? Can you think of any others?
2. As we prompt our small group participants each and every week: "What has the Lord done for you this week? What have you done for the Lord?"
3. Why might Archbishop Hebda have desired to begin with small groups? What remains to be done?
4. Are you in a Parish Evangelization Cells System small group? Could you be?