

PARISH PROCESS PROPOSED GUIDELINES

The vision is of a set of 7-week processes in each parish over the course of four years semesters. Participants for the initial phase in any given fall season would be a group of some 30-50 staff and lay leaders. Expansion of the process into the broader parish community is seen as being most easy to promote in each Lenten season following the fall round with leaders.

At the very start of the process, all participants gather in a large group to get an overview of Church teaching on evangelization and the archdiocesan initiative. Groups of between 5 to 7 people are formed and one member in each group is named facilitator. Each group then schedules itself for five gatherings on approximately a weekly basis. At each meeting, group members reflect on and talk about key questions as laid out in provided guides. The aim is to establish a relaxed environment and allow participants to share and verbalize their faith experiences. The outcome sought is individual awareness of the importance of personal relationship with Jesus Christ. A large group meeting in about the seventh week lets all participants share what they have learned, articulate the commonalities of faith that have been uncovered, and discuss the implications of those discoveries for themselves and the parish community.

Fourteen parishes piloted the first effort in fall 2003 and will be working to open the process to between 30% and 40% of their parishioners in Lent 2004. Using the pilot experience as a model, the remaining parishes in the archdiocese are being invited into the process with their leaders in fall 2004, with the prospect of opening it up to the larger parish communities in Lent 2005.

Process specifics:

Week 1:

Upon assembly of between 30 and 50 key parish staff and lay leaders, gather in a setting that is informal and very welcoming. Food and refreshments are encouraged. After some social time, the gathering begins.

- I. Welcome/ Evangelization Prayer
- II. Explanation of the gathering
- III. Videotape of Archbishop Flynn
- IV. Brief history of the Archdiocesan Task Force effort
 - a. Focus on study of Church documents and resulting evangelization definition.
- V. Goals of the process (emphasis on this being a multi-year process)
 - a. **Awakening:** to a sense of relationship with Jesus Christ, individually and communally
 - b. **Transformation:** conversion supported by prayer that is ongoing, both personal and communal
 - c. **Witness:** such that it influences each of us and the world around us
- VI. Break into small groups
 - a. Six to ten people each (groups stay together for the whole process)
 - b. Intermingle lay and staff from varying ministries
 - c. Assign a facilitator for each group (provide them with "tips" sheet)
 - d. Have individuals introduce themselves in the small group and share something of where they are in their spiritual journey and how it influences their lives.
- VII. Gather in full group
- VIII. Hand out support guides. Invite members to peruse, pray and reflect on the guides as each one comes up for conversation by their small groups.
- IX. Prayer/Adjourn

MORE

Weeks 2-6:

The next five meetings of the process envision the small groups gathering at times and places of the members' choice – approximately one meeting a week. The goal is to establish a sense of comfortable, small community that allows and encourages sharing of personal faith stories. Each week the facilitators, aided by resource materials, guide the groups in reflection and conversation on specific key questions. Experience in the pilot indicates this is effective in helping individuals become more aware of Jesus present and active in their personal lives.

The logistics and format of meetings can be adjusted to fit the need of each small group. It is suggested however that the following pieces be included:

1. Welcome and prayer
2. Exploration of a topic, guided by support materials, to achieve integration of the Church's perspective and group members' views
3. Prayer and adjourn

The key topics for the first five weekly meetings are:

- 1) Who is Jesus Christ to me and when did I first become aware of him in my life?
- 2) How do I experience Jesus Christ in my life now, through ups and downs?
- 3) What can I do to deepen and strengthen my personal relationship with Jesus Christ?
- 4) How can I take my relationship with Jesus to a deeper level of witness so that I am motivated to honor each person's inherent human dignity and advance the common good?
- 5) What is evangelization?

Week 7:

This is a summary meeting and is organized much like the first meeting. Participants attempt to:

- Identify common threads that emerged during small group reflection
- Explore the implications, within the context of Church teaching on evangelization, for individuals and the parish community
- Identify potential areas of parish life to which an evangelization focus could be applied
- Take initial stock of how the process might most easily be fostered through the rest of the parish

Key elements for fruitful results:

- Prayer
 - ✓ Nothing happens without the Spirit
- Openness to the process
 - ✓ Self examination of faith and faith sharing are foreign to many and may require patience
- Faith Sharing in small group
 - ✓ Personal stories are more powerful than teaching (Evangelii Nuntiandi-41)
- Respect for each person's place in their spiritual journey
 - ✓ No one is in exactly the same place or of the same mindset
 - ✓ This extends to prayer and what people are comfortable with
- Flexibility and gentle leadership by facilitators
 - ✓ Sense of welcome and safety is necessary
 - ✓ Openness to heartfelt prayer
- Commitment to the initiative as an ongoing "process" rather than a "program"