2005 2006

Small Faith Sharing Group Reflection Guide

Christmas - Winter Ordinary Time

Developed by
The Office For
Evangelization
& the Advisory
Committee on
Evangelization

Archdiocese of Chicago
155 E. Superior Street
Chicago, Illinois 60611
312.751.5353
www.goingforth.org

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Introduction

This Christmas/Winter Ordinary Time Small Faith-Sharing Group Reflection Guide is prepared for small faith-sharing group members in Catholic parishes and communities. The Reflection Guide combines Cycle B readings of the Sunday Lectionary with meditations, reflection questions and the Objectives from the <u>*Personal Mandate*</u> *of* ***Spreading the Holy Fire: A Plan for Catholics Evangelizing in the Archdiocese of Chicago*** *(available on-line at www.goingforth.org)*

This Season of Christmas and Winter Ordinary Time fall during winter, a time when the earth is cold and the weather is stark. This Season continues with the quiet of a new year with time to reflect on the Reign of God and plan to participate in its unfolding.

Each week offers the grace to gather with other disciples of Christ. As we encounter Jesus in a new way, we grow to *believe* more deeply in Him. Our shared experience and belief empower us to *share* our faith with others. Together, we take our deepened belief into personal relationships in family, friends, the workplace, our parish, neighborhoods and nation to *transform* the world into God's Reign: a kinder, better, more loving place. Believe, share, transform: this is what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, to be a Catholic, and to evangelize.

As a member of a small faith-sharing group, you will gather weekly with others to grow in faith. Be open to the process of growth that comes from sharing. Be open to the gift of holiness. Take responsibility for your own participation and encourage others to take part. The entire group benefits and grows together. As a small group member, please follow these guidelines:

Prepare	Get ready for the meetings by reading the Scriptures and reflection material before the meeting.
Participate	Pray. Read the Scriptures when asked. Respond aloud to the reflection questions. However, you may choose to "pass" at any time without explanation.
Pray	Pray for the group leader, the other members of the group and for yourself between meeting times.
Be Present	Attend all meetings unless pressing circumstances prevent it.
Be Personal	Talk about your own experience and share your own thoughts about how God speaks to you through the Scripture. Listen to the stories of others in the group and refrain from giving advice.
Be Confidential	What is shared in the group stays in the group. Realize that some areas may be too sensitive for people to respond to the faith-sharing questions or share an insight.
Be Gentle	If differences of opinion arise, respect those differences. There are as many ways to experience God's presence as there are people. We are all growing and on the journey together. Make the effort to understand another's viewpoint by being tender and kind. (Ephesians 4:15).

May this time be a rich experience of God's love that leads you to share that love with others.

The Gospel of Mark

Insights on Evangelization

The Scripture readings for the 2005-2006 Liturgical Year are from Cycle B of the Sunday Lectionary. In Cycle B, Sunday liturgies draw their Gospel readings from Mark.

Author/Audience

The Gospel of Mark is believed to be the earliest of the four written Gospels. The authorship of the Gospel is uncertain. Traditionally it has been assigned to John Mark, who was a cousin of Barnabas and an early disciple in the Christian community. John Mark accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their missionary journeys. Modern research proposes that the author may have been a Hellenistic Jewish Christian from Syria. Scripture scholars believe that the Gospel was written to the Gentiles, who did not know Jewish customs and traditions. The timing suggests that the Gospel was written to help disciples endure with their faith during a time of persecution. Scholars estimate that the Gospel of Mark was written around the year 70 AD.

Message and Themes

Mark's Gospel is the shortest of the four Gospels. Mark tells a vivid and dynamic story about Jesus' life, teaching and actions. The pace of the story is urgent and calls the reader to make a decision to act without hesitation. The Gospel of Mark gets right to the point. The opening verse states that this is the Good News of Jesus Christ, Son of God. Peter confesses Jesus as Messiah in response to Jesus question (Mark 8:29), "Who do you say that I am?" (It's not about what others say, it's about what <u>we</u> say.) The accounts of Jesus' dramatic healing and exorcisms show God's powerful activity breaking into human history to bring freedom from sin and death. The center of Jesus' saving activity is the cross - the heart of Jesus' mission and work. Mark shows that Jesus' disciples play an important role in the story. The disciples are present in almost every scene of Mark's Gospel. The first disciples are called to follow him right away (after only 16 verses into the Gospel!)

How the Gospel of Mark Relates to Evangelizing

As in Mark's Gospel, we are disciples of Jesus, who calls us to an important role in announcing the gospel in our times. Reflect upon these key insights from Mark's Gospel for evangelizing:

Commit: In Chapter 1, verse 16 of Mark's Gospel, the first disciples were called to follow Jesus. They responded immediately. How do I respond and commit to follow Jesus to become a "fisher of people?"

Believe: In Chapter 8, verse 29, Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter responded, "You are the Messiah." How do I confess Jesus and grow in my relationship with Him?

Share: In Chapter 15, verse 39, the Roman centurion witnessed how Jesus died on the cross and proclaimed, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" How does my life give witness so that "outsiders" come to see God's love for them?

Transform: In Chapter 6, verse 7, Jesus sent the Twelve on a mission to preach repentance and to bring healing and deliverance to people. They went and did it. How does my activity to "go, <u>live</u> my faith" bring healing and deliverance to others?

Source: Fr. Donald Senior, C.P. and Pheme Perkins, *Gospel of Mark, Reading Guide, The Catholic Study Bible, New American Bible, Oxford Press, pages RG405-RG417, pages 65-68.* See these articles for more detail on this Gospel.

Introduction to All Small Faith Sharing Sessions

PREPARE THE ENVIRONMENT

Optional: Prepare a small table and set up a picture of Jesus. Put a small basket or bowl in front of the picture. You may select another symbol and choose to enthrone a Bible. Have small note cards and pens available. Use this or another centerpiece that symbolizes celebrating God's entering the cold of winter by coming into our lives in a deeper and new way during this Season.

BECOME ACQUAINTED

Go around the group with each person sharing his or her hopes for the meeting.

GATHER TOGETHER IN THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST

Leader: As we gather together, we recall how God has come into our lives this past week and how God is present in our midst now.

After a moment of silence, ask the Holy Spirit to empower you and the group:

Come Holy Spirit,
Fill the hearts of all people with the fire of Your Love.
May all accept Your invitation to know and love Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Fill this Archdiocese with people who welcome
and invite others to share in the Catholic faith.
Fill our Cardinal, our bishops and priests, deacons and lay ministers
with wisdom and courage to live and
preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
Fill all parish and agency staff with Your power to
evangelize those whom they serve.

Fill all consecrated men and women and all lay people with the grace
to become and make disciples of Jesus through
prayer, work, and daily living.
May the holy fire of Your love transform our society according to the Gospel.

Come Holy Spirit! With the Father and the Son,
You are worshiped and glorified forever and ever. Amen.

EXTEND GOD'S INVITATION

On a notecard, write the name(s) of those whose lives may need the warmth of love during a cold winter of life, a new coming of God's Reign of love, peace, and justice. Place the cards in the bowl or basket.

REFLECT AND SHARE

For the Christmas/Winter Ordinary Time season, the Gospel readings in Cycle B are from Mark. The Gospel readings focus on Jesus' invitation to discipleship and on His teaching and healing. Reflect on each question below in turn or use your own questions. Allow group members, if they wish, to answer that question before the group moves on to the next question.

December 25, 2005 Christmas

READ THE SCRIPTURES
Read the Sunday Scriptures out loud together. Afterward, mention which Scripture passage touched you and why. What does the passage mean to you in your own life at this stage of your personal spiritual journey?

1st Reading: Isaiah 62:11-12
2nd Reading: Titus 3:4-7
Gospel: Luke 2:15-20

Reflection on the Gospel Reading
The passage from the Gospel of Luke appears in the Christmas Mass at Dawn. The Gospel shows the response of the shepherds after hearing the angels announce Jesus' birth. They made a commitment to journey to Bethlehem and they went "in haste" to find Jesus and His parents. After the shepherds encountered Jesus, they went out and shared their experience with others. The passage ends with the shepherds praising and glorifying God.

Reflection Questions:

Believe: *What does my encounter with Jesus mean to me this Christmas?*

Share: *How do I make the message of Jesus' presence known to others?*

Transform: *What responses of others do I notice that bring about more peace and love at Christmas?*

PRAY FOR EACH OTHER
Pray together for any petitions and any needs that you might have. Stand in a circle together and say the Our Father. Pray daily this week for the person on your right.

LEAVE TO EVANGELIZE YOUR WORLD
Reflect on your mission to grow deeper in your relationship with God. Be welcoming, offer hospitality and work for transformation in your daily life. Suggestions for this coming week:

Believe: On Christmas morning, set aside prayer time to praise and glorify God for Jesus' presence in your life.

Share: On Christmas day, share a story of love with your family that you've discovered about Jesus' presence.

Transform: On Christmas day, pray for peace and good will for all and then act in the present moment to bring about a small part of peace on earth.

January 1, 2006 Mary, Mother of God

READ THE SCRIPTURES
Read the Sunday Scriptures out loud together. Afterward, mention which Scripture passage touched you and why. What does the passage mean to you in your own life at this stage of your personal spiritual journey?

1st Reading: Numbers 6:22-27
2nd Reading: Galatians 4:4-7
Gospel: Luke 2:16-21

Reflection on the Gospel Reading
Today's reading from Luke's Gospel is the same passage proclaimed at Christmas' Mass at Dawn. Mary gave birth to Jesus, who was His mother. In the midst of the shepherd's visit and all of the duties to nurse and tend to Jesus, Mary kept these things and reflected on them in her heart. After the shepherds departed, Mary and Joseph named their son, Jesus, cooperating with the angel who announced His birth.

Reflection Questions:

Believe: *What do I treasure the most about Mary's faith?*

Share: *How has my mother (grandmother, aunt, women of faith) influenced my own faith?*

Transform: *What role do women play in transforming the world and the Church?*

PRAY FOR EACH OTHER
Pray together for any petitions and any needs that you might have. Stand in a circle together and say the Our Father. Pray daily this week for the person on your right.

LEAVE TO EVANGELIZE YOUR WORLD
Reflect on your mission to grow deeper in your relationship with God. Be welcoming, offer hospitality and work for transformation in your daily life. Suggestions for this coming week:

Believe: One day this week, pray the Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary. Focus on the movement toward Jesus' birth and Mary's faith response to Him.

Share: Learn about the stature of Mary held by someone of another Christian denomination, of Jewish or Muslim heritage. Share your perspective with them.

Transform: Do something kind for an unwed mother, a single mom or a mother bound by poverty.

January 8, 2006 Feast of the Epiphany

READ THE SCRIPTURES
Read the Sunday Scriptures out loud together. Afterward, mention which Scripture passage touched you and why. What does the passage mean to you in your own life at this stage of your personal spiritual journey?

1st Reading: Isaiah 60:1-6
2nd Reading: Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6
Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12

Reflection on the Gospel Reading
Today's Gospel from Matthew recalls the journey of the magi from the east to discover the new born king. Their arrival in Jerusalem troubled King Herod and those in the city. After learning where to find the new born king, the magi set out for Bethlehem where they found Jesus and his mother. After worshiping Jesus, the magi offered gold, frankincense and myrrh. They returned home by a different route to avoid Herod.

Reflection Questions:

Believe: *Epiphany means appearance. How has a recent life circumstance led me to discover Jesus in a new way?*

Share: *What gifts have I offered to Jesus this past week to share His message of love with others?*

Transform: *At the start of this new calendar year, what resolutions have I made to increase the social justice in the world?*

PRAY FOR EACH OTHER
Pray together for any petitions and any needs that you might have. Stand in a circle together and say the Our Father. Pray daily this week for the person on your right.

LEAVE TO EVANGELIZE YOUR WORLD
Reflect on your mission to grow deeper in your relationship with God. Be welcoming, offer hospitality and work for transformation in your daily life. Suggestions for this coming week:

Believe: In prayer, offer Jesus the gift of yourself and listen to what He tells you.

Share: Go to a "foreign land" - a different ethnic neighborhood, a different church or some unfamiliar place and follow the Spirit's promptings to dialog about your Catholic faith.

Transform: Focus on one resolution that you made to bring about social justice this year and take an action step this week.

January 15, 2006 Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

READ THE SCRIPTURES
Read the Sunday Scriptures out loud together. Afterward, mention which Scripture passage touched you and why. What does the passage mean to you in your own life at this stage of your personal spiritual journey?

1st Reading: 1 Samuel 3:3b-10,19
2nd Reading: 1 Corinthians 6:13c-15a, 17-20
Gospel: John 1:35-41

Reflection on the Gospel Reading
Today's reading from the Gospel of John renders an account of Andrew and Simon Peter's encounter with Jesus. Andrew, one of John the Baptist's disciples, was present when John pointed out Jesus as the Lamb of God. When Andrew and the other disciple approached Jesus, He asked them what they wanted and they asked where He lived. Jesus invited them to come and see. They stayed with Him, then Andrew found his brother Simon Peter and announced they had found the Messiah. Andrew brought Simon Peter to Jesus, who renamed Simon to Peter.

Reflection Questions:

Believe: *In my life journey, when has Jesus invited me to "come and see" where He lived and spend time with Him?*

Share: *With whom in my family have I most recently shared the news, "I have found the Messiah!"*

Transform: *How can I help change the world of others by bringing them to Jesus?*

PRAY FOR EACH OTHER
Pray together for any petitions and any needs that you might have. Stand in a circle together and say the Our Father. Pray daily this week for the person on your right.

LEAVE TO EVANGELIZE YOUR WORLD
Reflect on your mission to grow deeper in your relationship with God. Be welcoming, offer hospitality and work for transformation in your daily life. Suggestions for this coming week:

Believe: During the week, set aside time to stay with Jesus and learn from Him.

Share: Share the above experience with one of your family members.

Transform: Use the power of your personal encouragement to affirm someone, near or far, as valuable in God's eyes.

January 22, 2006 Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

READ THE SCRIPTURES
Read the Sunday Scriptures out loud together. Afterward, mention which Scripture passage touched you and why. What does the passage mean to you in your own life at this stage of your personal spiritual journey?

1st Reading: Jonah 3:1-5, 10
2nd Reading: 1 Corinthians 7:29-31
Gospel: Mark 1:14-20

Reflection on the Gospel Reading
Today's passage from the Gospel of Mark opens with the public ministry of Jesus - announcing the nearness of God's Kingdom, calling for change and belief in the Gospel. Jesus called Simon and Andrew, James and John, two sets of brothers and fishermen, to follow Him. Immediately, they dropped what they were doing and followed Jesus.

Reflection Questions:

Believe: *How do I respond when Jesus asks me to follow Him?*

Share: *How do I feel about being a "fisher of people?" What does this mean to me?*

Transform: *What do I imagine my role to be in transforming society by following Jesus and being a "fisher of people?"*

PRAY FOR EACH OTHER
Pray together for any petitions and any needs that you might have. Stand in a circle together and say the Our Father. Pray daily this week for the person on your right.

LEAVE TO EVANGELIZE YOUR WORLD
Reflect on your mission to grow deeper in your relationship with God. Be welcoming, offer hospitality and work for transformation in your daily life. Suggestions for this coming week:

Believe: In prayer, imagine yourself in the shoes of Peter, Andrew, James or John as Jesus calls you to follow Him. Listen to your response.

Share: Have a faith conversation with a neighbor or coworker with whom you normally don't talk.

Transform: Go fishing. Share a kind act with those in leadership positions - teachers, parents, pastors, government officials, bosses.

January 29, 2006 Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

READ THE SCRIPTURES
Read the Sunday Scriptures out loud together. Afterward, mention which Scripture passage touched you and why. What does the passage mean to you in your own life at this stage of your personal spiritual journey?

1st Reading: Deuteronomy 18:15-20
2nd Reading: 1 Corinthians 7:32-35
Gospel: Mark 1:21-28

Reflection on the Gospel Reading
Today's gospel reading from Mark focuses on the authority and remarkable action of Jesus. Jesus taught and astonished His listeners. Jesus spoke and drove out sickness, amazing those present. As a result, Jesus' reputation grew throughout the region of Galilee.

Reflection Questions:

Believe: *What words of Jesus have touched me and helped my faith in Him to grow?*

Share: *What have I shared of the deeds of Jesus that I have experienced in my life?*

Transform: *How can I live the Gospel to cast out unclean spirits of prejudice, racism, intolerance or hatred?*

PRAY FOR EACH OTHER
Pray together for any petitions and any needs that you might have. Stand in a circle together and say the Our Father. Pray daily this week for the person on your right.

LEAVE TO EVANGELIZE YOUR WORLD
Reflect on your mission to grow deeper in your relationship with God. Be welcoming, offer hospitality and work for transformation in your daily life. Suggestions for this coming week:

Believe: In prayer, reflect on this Gospel reading and ask Jesus to cast out something unclean in your life.

Share: Tell a close friend about your encounter with Jesus' healing power in your life.

Transform: Cast out the unclean spirits of prejudice, racism, intolerance or hatred by making a new friend with someone who is oppressed by one of these.

February 5, 2006 Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

READ THE SCRIPTURES
Read the Sunday Scriptures out loud together. Afterward, mention which Scripture passage touched you and why. What does the passage mean to you in your own life at this stage of your personal spiritual journey?

1st Reading: Job 7:1-4, 6-7
2nd Reading: 1 Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23
Gospel: Mark 1:29-39

Reflection on the Gospel Reading
Today's passage from Mark's Gospel narrates the healing power of Jesus as He cured Peter's mother-in-law of her fever and those townspeople who gathered at the house. Even though Jesus left for a deserted place to pray, His disciples sought Him out with the news that everyone was looking for Him. Jesus responded by returning to preach and cure the people throughout the territory.

Reflection Questions:

Believe: *How have I sought out Jesus' healing touch in my life?*

Share: *To what "nearby villages" am I called to spread the Good News?*

Transform: *What demons in our society am I called to cast out? How would I go about doing this?*

PRAY FOR EACH OTHER
Pray together for any petitions and any needs that you might have. Stand in a circle together and say the Our Father. Pray daily this week for the person on your right.

LEAVE TO EVANGELIZE YOUR WORLD
Reflect on your mission to grow deeper in your relationship with God. Be welcoming, offer hospitality and work for transformation in your daily life. Suggestions for this coming week:

Believe: Identify one "fever" that affects your spiritual, emotional, mental or physical health. Ask Jesus for healing.

Share: Each day this week, pray for a family member, friend or co-worker whose "fever" keeps him or her in ill health.

Transform: During the week, identify one "fever" in society that holds many people bound. Pray for their freedom and well-being and take an appropriate action as the Spirit prompts you.

February 12, 2006 Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

READ THE SCRIPTURES
Read the Sunday Scriptures out loud together. Afterward, mention which Scripture passage touched you and why. What does the passage mean to you in your own life at this stage of your personal spiritual journey?

1st Reading: Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46
2nd Reading: 1 Corinthians 10:31 - 11:1
Gospel: Mark 1:40-45

Reflection on the Gospel Reading
As in the past Sundays, today's passage from Mark's Gospel focuses on Jesus' desire and power to heal. Jesus encountered a leper who asked Him to be cured, depending on Jesus' desire. Jesus responded that He did want the leper well and the man became whole. Although Jesus warned the leper to say nothing of the event, the man publicized it. As a result, people from everywhere came looking for Jesus.

Reflection Questions:

Believe: *What do I believe about Jesus' desire to heal me and others?*

Share: *How do I respond to publicize the news when I or a friend receive healing?*

Transform: *How would the world be different if people came to Jesus everywhere to be cured of their ills?*

PRAY FOR EACH OTHER
Pray together for any petitions and any needs that you might have. Stand in a circle together and say the Our Father. Pray daily this week for the person on your right.

LEAVE TO EVANGELIZE YOUR WORLD
Reflect on your mission to grow deeper in your relationship with God. Be welcoming, offer hospitality and work for transformation in your daily life. Suggestions for this coming week:

Believe: In prayer, imagine yourself as a leper before Jesus asking for a cure. Be open to experiencing Jesus' look of mercy and healing touch.

Share: Write a letter to a newspaper or magazine editor to publicize your faith. Remember to sign your name.

Transform: Visit someone who is regarded as an outcast or leper in your neighborhood, parish or community. Share your friendship, physical presence and prayers.

February 19, 2006 Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

READ THE SCRIPTURES
Read the Sunday Scriptures out loud together. Afterward, mention which Scripture passage touched you and why. What does the passage mean to you in your own life at this stage of your personal spiritual journey?

1st Reading: Isaiah 43:18-19, 21-23, 24b-25
2nd Reading: 2 Corinthians 1:18-22
Gospel: Mark 2:1-12

Reflection on the Gospel Reading
"We have never seen anything like this!" The last verse of today's Gospel expresses the astonishment of the people who witnessed the cure of a paralytic man. Jesus spoke forgiveness when he saw the faith of the paralyzed man's friends lowering him through the ceiling. In response to scribes questioning His authority to forgive sins, Jesus spoke a command of healing. The man got up and went home. Those who witnessed the healing glorified God, "We have never seen anything like this!"

Reflection Questions:

Believe: *How is my faith affected by what I see God doing in my life and the lives of others?*

Share: *What person would I "lower in front of Jesus" so he/she could experience His forgiveness and healing?*

Transform: *What astounding faith of others that has had a transforming affect on society have I witnessed?*

PRAY FOR EACH OTHER
Pray together for any petitions and any needs that you might have. Stand in a circle together and say the Our Father. Pray daily this week for the person on your right.

LEAVE TO EVANGELIZE YOUR WORLD
Reflect on your mission to grow deeper in your relationship with God. Be welcoming, offer hospitality and work for transformation in your daily life. Suggestions for this coming week:

Believe: Go into your room, shut the door and lay down on a rug or mat. Ask Jesus to free you from sin so you will get back on your feet to live a holy life.

Share: Pray for someone you have never seen before.

Transform: Do something new - something never seen before - to touch the life of someone crippled by fear, poverty or homelessness.

February 26, 2006 Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

READ THE SCRIPTURES
Read the Sunday Scriptures out loud together. Afterward, mention which Scripture passage touched you and why. What does the passage mean to you in your own life at this stage of your personal spiritual journey?

1st Reading: Hosea 2:16b, 17b, 21-22
2nd Reading: 2 Corinthians 3:1b-6
Gospel: Mark 2:18-22

Reflection on the Gospel Reading
After several Sundays where the Gospel of Mark told healing stories, today's passage focuses on Jesus' wisdom. Jesus responds to an inquiry as to why His disciples did not fast like those of John the Baptist or the Pharisees. Jesus told a parable about a wedding, a new garment, new wine and wine skins. Something new was unfolding in the life and teaching of Jesus for those who followed Him.

Reflection Questions:

Believe: *What teaching of Jesus seems radically new and challenging to me?*

Share: *How do I accept or question the religious or spiritual practices of others?*

Transform: *What areas of humanity, within my own sphere of influence, need a fresh expression of love, kindness and peace?*

PRAY FOR EACH OTHER
Pray together for any petitions and any needs that you might have. Stand in a circle together and say the Our Father. Pray daily this week for the person on your right.

LEAVE TO EVANGELIZE YOUR WORLD
Reflect on your mission to grow deeper in your relationship with God. Be welcoming, offer hospitality and work for transformation in your daily life. Suggestions for this coming week:

Believe: Imagine yourself as a best man or maid of honor at a wedding feast where Jesus is the groom. Write down the "toast"that you would deliver.

Share: Mardi Gras - the feast before Lent - is this coming Tuesday. Share the feast of your faith with your family on that day.

Transform: Share some of your unused clean winter clothing (like sweaters, hats, coats, gloves, etc.) with others in need this week.

Afterword

Renewal of Baptismal Vows/ Profession of Faith
I reject sin so as to live in the freedom of God's children.
I reject the glamour of evil and refuse to be mastered by sin.
I reject Satan, father of sin and prince of darkness.
I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, His Only Son, our Lord, who was born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified, died and was buried, rose from the dead and is now seated with the Father.
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the dead and life everlasting.

Comments are Welcome
Thank you for participating in these small faith-sharing group sessions, reflecting on Scripture in the light of evangelization. By virtue of baptism, everyone is called to evangelize. If you are interested in working in evangelization in a greater way, ask your pastor about joining a Parish Evangelization Team or participating in an outreach ministry at your parish.

The Office for Evangelization would appreciate your comments, experiences, thoughts and ideas on what you or your group has learned through the small-faith sharing process. You may write, call, fax or e-mail comments to:

Rev. Joseph Kruszynski, OFM Conv.
Director, Office for Evangelization
Archdiocese of Chicago
155 E. Superior Street
Chicago, IL 60611
Voice: (312) 751-5353
Fax: (312) 751-7884
Jkruszynski@archchicago.org

About the Author
Dave Pipitone is an active Roman Catholic who is husband to Cheryl and father to Emily. He has participated in and led small-faith sharing groups, authored faith-sharing materials for the Archdiocese of Chicago, wrote the reflection questions for *Spreading the Holy Fire: A Plan for Catholics Evangelizing in the Archdiocese of Chicago* and has contributed to *Disciples in Prayer* (Oregon Catholic Press.) Dave serves as an ad hoc member of the Advisory Committee for the Office for Evangelization of the Archdiocese. He is a 2003 graduate of the Chicago Catholic Scripture School offered through the Office of Catechesis of the Archdiocese of Chicago.

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THE PERSONAL MANDATE: *Becoming a Disciple*

PERSONAL OBJECTIVE ONE: COMMITMENT

Each Catholic will recommit her/himself to Jesus Christ as a disciple by embracing evangelization as their personal mission.

Strategies

- Accept God's invitation to personal conversion, to know and love Jesus as Lord and Savior.
- Pray daily for the grace and power of the Holy Spirit to be more of a disciple of Jesus Christ by growing in faith, hope, and love.
- Pray daily for the spread of the Gospel and for all of the disciples of Jesus, especially the Church's official ministers and our Cardinal Archbishop.
- Develop a mindset of "being sent" to share the Good News with everyone.
- Write a personal mission statement in light of evangelization and discipleship.
- Renew your Baptismal Promises on a regular basis (daily if possible) as a sign of your commitment to discipleship and evangelization.
- Take a personal inventory on a regular basis (daily) by examining your conscience, your intentions, and your actions.
- Create a daily plan to evangelize by being "intentional" in what you say and do.
- Witness to the Gospel and to Jesus Christ by living as a faithful, practicing Catholic.
- Support the Church by exercising Gospel stewardship of personal time, talent, and treasure.

Visible Signs

- Individual Catholics have a sense of personal mission and of "being sent."
- Individual Catholics are volunteering for church programs, ministries, and outreach.
- The witness of individual Catholics is noticed at home, in the parish, and in the neighborhood.

PERSONAL OBJECTIVE TWO: BELIEVE

Each Catholic will respond to God's grace to grow in personal holiness by deepening his/her personal relationship with Jesus and His Church.

Strategies

- Actively participate in the Sunday Eucharist on a regular basis.
- Try to share in the Eucharist more often than Sunday.
- Cultivate a daily practice of personal prayer and conversation with God.
- Actively celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation as a part of your spiritual life.
- Encourage family members to participate in celebrating the Sacramental Life of the Church, especially the sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation.
- Develop a deeper appreciation for the Sacred Scriptures by reading and reflecting upon them on a regular basis, especially the readings of the liturgical day.

PART THREE

- Participate in faith-sharing prayer and other spiritual formation events like retreats, parish missions, days of reflection, and the like.
- Join in a small faith-sharing group or small Christian community to share prayer, faith, and Scripture.
- Study and reflect upon the rich heritage and teachings of the Catholic Church as expressed in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* or other such documents and share them with others.
- Develop a daily, personal spiritual regimen; e.g., morning and evening prayers, prayer before meals, examination of conscience, Scripture reading, personal devotions, Mass, etc.

Visible Signs

- Catholics actively and regularly participate in the celebration of the sacramental life of the Church, especially the Holy Eucharist.
- Individual Catholics are enthusiastic about being Catholic.
- Individual Catholics are alive with an informed faith, a vibrant hope for the coming of God's Reign, and a joyful love of God. God's presence is experienced and witnessed.

PERSONAL OBJECTIVE THREE: SHARE

Each Catholic will reach out to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with everyone and especially newcomers, inactive Catholics, the marginalized, and the unchurched.

Strategies

- Become a sharing person who freely witnesses to the Catholic Faith and recount personal experiences openly with others.
- Invite a new parishioner, neighbor, or friend to dinner or a social event to build a friendship based on Christ's love.
- Visit a new parishioner or neighbor in his or her home to build community and communion.
- Become a minister of care and bring Holy Communion to the homebound and hospitalized.
- Practice hospitality in the parish, in the neighborhood, in the workplace by listening, encouraging, affirming, and celebrating others.
- Develop a welcoming atmosphere at home by being present for family meals and other family celebrations and special occasions.
- Celebrate the diversity and faith of people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds by sharing stories and entering into conversation and dialogue. (Resources: The pastoral letter of Francis Cardinal George *Dwell in My Love* (April 2001) and the U.S. Catholic Bishops' statement entitled *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity*)
- Reach out and welcome Catholics who have become inactive in the practice of their faith by listening to their stories and inviting them, when ready, to return to active participation in the Church. (Resource: *A Time to Listen...A Time to Heal: A Resource Directory for Reaching Out to Inactive Catholics*, U.S. Catholic Bishops Handbook, November 1998)
- Know the outreach ministries of the parish and invite fellow parishioners, friends and family members to enroll in outreach sessions.
- Witness the Gospel to the unchurched and to those who have never heard of Christ and His Church by word and deed so that they may come to know of God's love for them.

Visible Signs

- Inactive Catholics are being invited to return to the practice of their faith.
- Individual Catholics express a joyful spirit of hospitality.
- Individual Catholics live out the paradigm shift of the Second Vatican Council by being focused on outreach to all and not just to practicing Catholics.

PERSONAL OBJECTIVE FOUR: TRANSFORM

Each Catholic will participate in the transformation of society and culture by living and proclaiming the Gospel of Life.

Strategies

- Develop a deeper gratitude and practice of sacrificial love in families to mirror the love of Christ and strengthen the domestic church. (Resource: *Follow the Way of Love: A Pastoral Message of the U.S. Catholic Bishops to Families*)
- Seek out opportunities to witness to Christ through social programs and church-sponsored outreach ministries. (Resources: *Everyday Christianity: To Hunger and Thirst for Justice* and *In All Things Charity: A Pastoral Challenge for the New Millennium,* U.S. Catholic Bishops)
- Exercise political rights in accord with Gospel and Catholic values by voting, campaigning, and becoming involved in the political process to shape a political environment based on Gospel values of respect for the dignity of the human person. (Resources: *Living the Gospel of Life: A Challenge to America's Catholics and Faithful Citizenship* by the U.S. Catholic Bishops)
- Discern and practice the wise use of those contemporary media which affirm human life and Gospel values, including reading materials and viewing programs that are in accord with Catholic values and beliefs. (Resources: *Family Guide for Using the Media, Your Family and Cyberspace, Civility in Media, Renewing the Mind of the Media, Family Guide for Using the Media,* U.S. Catholic Bishops)
- Develop an appreciation of the arts and their messages in order to hear the signs of the times and discern the Holy Spirit's voice calling for transformation.
- Develop and practice a spirituality of work so that all employers and employees are transformed by just labor relationships.
- Practice faith by witnessing to the Gospel in all areas of your daily life including family, neighborhood, workplace, politics, the arts, the sciences, media, and other areas.
- Work in your neighborhood, parish, and home to foster cultural diversity and racial justice.
- Be involved in parish and local service groups in your neighborhood which serve the needs of the neighborhood.
- Study and reflect upon the social teachings of the Church.

Visible Signs

- Individual Catholics are involved in putting into practice the social teachings of the Church.
- Persons are transformed in their personal lives as they are affected by the power of the Gospel.
- People everywhere recognize the transforming presence of Jesus in the workplace, neighborhood, parish, and home in the quality of human relationships.

PART THREE

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. *Of what importance is the Personal Mandate? To whom does it apply?*
2. *Where and how do individuals achieve the strategies to commit, believe, share, and transform society? What resources do they need?*
3. *What visible signs appeal the most to you? Why?*