



## ***A Community of Communities***

*The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew. In this Exhortation I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy, while pointing out new paths for the Church's journey in years to come.* (Pope Francis – The Joy of the Gospel #1)

In *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis writes: “I dream of a ‘missionary option’, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation”. (EG #27)

Pope Francis immediately follows this statement with a discussion about the role of the parish community, when he states: “In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers. It is a *community of communities*, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a center of constant missionary outreach. We must admit, though, that the call to review and renew our parishes has not yet sufficed to bring them nearer to people, to make them environments of living communion and participation, and to make them completely mission-oriented”. (EG #28)

As such, Bishop David Bonnar, in his first Pastoral Letter – *Testify to the Light*, has stated: “It is my dream that parishes will form small groups for people to share their faith and support one another as they become disciples. These small groups can be tailored to accommodate people’s schedules and be made up of men, women, married couples and single individuals. By coming together in a small venue, individuals can share their faith and encounter Jesus through the Gospel and in other ways enabling them to go forth and proclaim the Gospel. Small groups are a powerful way to accompany one another as pilgrims on the journey”.



### **Parish Based Small Faith-Sharing Groups**

In forming small groups within our parishes, members of the parish community are invited to share their faith with one another as they grow in their discipleship. As members of the family of God, by coming together in the small group setting of 6 - 12 people, you have an opportunity to create long-lasting, genuine relationships with people who share your faith and want to be a part of your life. Together, you can share and live out the joy of the gospel through fellowship, prayer and worship, while growing in your Catholic faith.

## How does a Small Group work?

**Small Group:** A group of 6-12 people who gather together to socialize, pray, study, discuss, and grow in the Catholic faith.

**Meeting Location and When You Meet:** The initial meetings would meet on your parish campus, but depending on the makeup of the group, may seek to meet in another location. This is at the discretion of the group members. You may choose to meet in a home or elsewhere (i.e. a coffee shop, restaurant with a private room/area). Groups often rotate meeting at each other's homes. It is encouraged that you meet once a week or every other week to study the chosen materials, but at least once a month.

**Coordinator / Facilitator:** A Small Group Facilitator facilitates the group meetings. The facilitator commits to knowing the material in advance, being prepared to facilitate the group discussion, and arranging for opening/closing prayer. They serve to encourage participation and faith sharing and create an atmosphere of hospitality and trust among all the participants. The Small Group Facilitator is not a theologian and is not a counselor. Additional assistance can be provided by the Office of Missionary Discipleship and the Office of Religious Education.

**Program Materials:** You may choose study materials from a variety of topics available through the Diocese of Youngstown Media Library (seasonal materials are always highlighted via the Diocesan Office of Religious Education). Topics may include scripture and faith-based studies, prayer, seasons of the Church, and areas of special interest.

## Why should I consider joining a Small Group?

**Unique Mission:** Small groups can help you discern and live out the unique mission God has given to you on this earth. They help you to share the joy of the gospel with others in your life.

**Community / Relationship:** Small groups build our sense of community and help us to belong to the family of God at the parish. Small groups are an opportunity to create deep and lasting relationships with people who will share times of joy in your life, as well as encourage and help you in times of difficulty.

**Faith:** Small groups help you to know, love, and serve the Lord through prayer, generosity and evangelization. They help you to build your faith and strengthen your friendship with Christ and the Catholic Church.

**Relevance:** Small groups are flexible and can select materials geared to members' interests and needs. They help you to receive God's grace in your daily life.

JOIN A  
**SMALL**  
GROUP

## The Next Step!

Please take some time to prayerfully reflect on the importance of joining a small group and then **contact your parish office** for more information about the small group opportunities at your parish.

***Missionary Disciples accompany Missionary Disciples!*** (EG #173)