



Small Group Report Summary—Week One

The Year of Renewal small group sessions are off to a great start! Meetings have taken place and all participants seem to be very enthusiastic. In order to keep all St. John Fisher Faith Family members informed of group discussions, each of the facilitators have been asked to provide input regarding their sessions. This input has been asked for in three major areas: Key insights or experiences, discussion surprises, and suggestions for the SJF parish.

Key Insights and Experiences

Each small group facilitator was asked to list some of the key insights, ideas or experiences expressed during their first discussion. Listed below are the insights provided by the facilitators with some small modifications to shorten the text or to provide consistency of language.

- SJF is truly the “people’s church” and what church is supposed to be.
- There is a strong belief in the power of prayer and the support felt from the prayers of others during personal times of need.
- Some members of one group have experienced God at a critical time in their lives. They experienced an overwhelming sense of peace and warmth.
- Many have learned that complete surrender to God’s love and judgment is necessary to solve “unsolvable” problems.
- All members of one group felt that God had guided them to “discover” a path to change.
- The hymn “How Great Thou Art” and the awesomeness and vastness of God and how God is in everyone and everything were talked about. That led to the thought of treating everyone as if they were God and seeing God in others. Prayer: it was suggested that we don’t need to be talking to God so much as waiting and listening for God’s voice.
- All the group members (of a specific group) feel they have a close relationship with God and feel God’s presence in their lives.
- “I wouldn’t be a practicing Catholic without the people at SJFC.”
- The Spirit of God is in all of us-God the Father is a medieval view and now we know that God is more than just that image.....original sin doesn't resonate anymore; many believe in Original Blessing instead.
- The formal words of the liturgy may fill a need for some people, but don’t seem to “jive” with our growing adult level faith and changes in our understanding of conscience. Everyone is on their own personal journey.
- There was group consensus that God is good and loving. Everyone agreed that their relationship with God changes over time. Trying to direct God is futile, be open to hear God.
- God is a part of us all – God is not a he or she somewhere “out there”
- Relationships are the essence of experiencing God – God is love and love is God.
- One group agreed that they are STILL Catholic because the Catholic Faith is part of their culture, they grew up that way. It is shared with their history, their ancestry. That “history” keeps them seeking. But it was also agreed that being a part of SJFC and the SJFC community plays a major role in why they are still Catholic.
- When one is worried about something, that there is no control over, be reminded that God is in control.

- When help is really needed, experiences where someone shows up to help makes one wonder if that person was sent by God.
- Group members did share their personal visions of GOD. It helped others know that as individuals, we experience and relate to GOD differently.

Surprises

Small group discussion sometimes leads to surprising comments, level of involvement or revelations. Following are some of the items that the small group facilitators reported as surprises (or at least worthy of note):

- One group found it surprising that all members had similar experiences in the journey to SJF: all tried other parishes first, looking for nourishment and acceptance and a good fit for family.
- For each member of the group, the friendly and welcoming attitude of the parishioners was notable and an incentive to join the parish.
- Members of one group mentioned experiencing God through intervention from a deceased loved one. These spiritual encounters provided comfort and answers to questions for the individuals.
- It was noted by one facilitator that everyone was most willing to participate. Several members commented on how much they enjoyed the small group experience, as it provided an opportunity to get to know others in the SJF community better.
- There was some discussion by a group about the role the American Bishops play in interpreting the rules and regulations from the Vatican.
- There was also discussion and questioning about how and why we pray. There were questions about "what is prayer."
- A group discussed wanting to be FOR others. Also, it was noted that all are God like.
- Everyone in one group enjoys the homilists at SJF. However, they would like to see more of the everyday people sharing their experiences as the three chapel members did on the first Tuesday "celebration."
- A group conclusion: It is okay to feel like God has deserted you. Even others with very strong faith feel that way sometimes. I am not alone.
- There is a strong desire among group members to suggest ways to improve the SJF parish.

Suggestions for Parish Renewal

Based on the group discussions, facilitators were also asked to provide any suggestions or values that would benefit the parish. While several groups have not yet addressed parish wide recommendations, several suggestions were submitted. Highlights of these are as follows:

- Future parish activities should follow the model of the Tuesday evening Year of Renewal session.
- Fr. Jerry's strength as our parish leader was noted by more than one group. One asked: When he retires, will our parish be able to continue as we know it today?
- Seeing God in others sometimes is literal and sometimes is only figurative. But, our personal relationships with God are richer when we all acknowledge the Divine in others.
- One group mentioned the strength of weekend homilies being occasionally given by a parish member. This gives a different perspective on our faith.
- Another of the small groups values friendly time, "dipping" the host in wine (not drinking from communal cup) and the friendships they have made at church.
- It was suggested that a homily and/or visit from the Archbishop would share his presence as a shepherd.
- A workshop on Vatican II for the many who don't know what transpired and the implications for us as Catholics today was recommended.
- It was also suggested that our experience of liturgy and prayers be more relevant and up to date with our Universe Story and not just the old words of traditional liturgy (thee, thou, etc.).
- Finally, a suggestion that during homilies and reflections, there is a need to address more of what is really going on in the lives of our parishioners. "We need to meet the congregation where they are."