

**St. John Fisher Year of Renewal**  
**Small Group Report Summary – Session 3**

The fall sessions of the Year of Renewal are coming to a close. Based on the input received from the facilitators, the small groups have all had very spirit filled discussions.

**Key Insights and Experiences**

Listed below are the key insights expressed during the third discussion sessions as provided by the group facilitators.

- The Gospel message, which describes the end times, warns us to be ready and not to focus our energies and attention on false temples.
- Hearing and reading Christ's message describing the infinite love God has for His/Her creations should allay our fears of death.
- On occasion, one group would like to review the readings associated with this YOR small group meeting; however, the reading passages were not noted in the handout.
- "I want to belong to the church Jesus founded". While several group members (of one group) have immediate family members who belong to other churches, there was consensus that group members all feel they belong in our church. Other faiths/churches may have beneficial elements, but group members are where they belong.
- One group noted that the small group sharing topic on Karl Rahner "came out of the blue," however it was discussed. The group noted that people who were not committed to the church may have left it, especially if they were looking for an excuse (pedophile issues, etc.). This could result in a smaller, more intense church.
- A group noted St. John Fisher strengths: Friendly time, everyone participates, more/most church members are involved and contribute. We preach the gospel by living it.
- The same group submitted St John Fisher weaknesses - As a group, we can only solve some problems. There is no week day Mass in the morning, especially during lent.
- The institutional church sometimes seems juxtaposed to the life/message of Jesus.
- All members of one group are outraged by the tone of the investigation into the women religious groups.
- Primacy of our conscience, formed through the years with active discernment, is so important in living our faith.
- As a church, we often don't live up to the meaning of "Catholic" with such things as bishops publicly excluding people from communion, excommunicating nuns for ministering to gays, etc.
- Members need to be proactive to make the church a living community; we can't sit and wait for something to happen.
- The baptism homily quoted on pages 8-9 (of the discussion booklet) resonated with group members as to what is found in the church, especially at SJF.
- Another group feels there is a strong need for priests and a strong need to attract young people in the church.
- Can the Catholic Church survive the time it will take to change? Some changes that were suggested: Allowing priests to marry, ordained women, inclusiveness of homosexuals, accepting divorced Catholics, becoming a church that is far more oriented to justice in the world.
- What is positive about being Catholic? The Eucharist, being a part of something much bigger, a unity. There is still a link between Jerusalem at the time of Christ and SJF today.
- There are concerns with the hierarchy of the Church still attempting to "steer" people toward or away from certain political candidates or views, based on a particular issue (i.e., abortion). There is a strong feeling that there must be a separation of Church and state.
- There is confidence in our belief that what it means to be Catholic helps us to be non-judgmental.
- The Primacy of Conscience described in the "Fundamental Treasures of the Church" is not really a treasure of the Church. In all the big events of our lives the Church takes it away.
- The rules of the Church are created by man and imposed upon man by man (the hierarchy).
- All the major religions are leading people to the same place. Whatever road or map people use, the Golden Rule to "do unto others as you would have done unto you" is the primary message.
- One group believes a weakness of the Church is that it treats educated people like they are uneducated.
- If the Church allowed people to practice Primacy of Conscience would the church be smaller (as Karl Rahner suggests) or larger and stronger?

**St. John Fisher Year of Renewal**  
**Small Group Report Summary – Session 3 (continued)**

**Surprises**

Following are the items that the small group facilitators reported as surprises from their discussions:

- One group reported that there seemed to be a universal feeling that a loving and merciful God would not damn someone to hell for all eternity.
- An “older” group noted that all had been taught that God was like an accountant keeping track of good and bad deeds in His black book. Members heard little of a loving God during their growing up years.
- One group member wrote Pope Benedict to express her support for women religious and asked “Instead of spending time, money and talent on this issue please turn your efforts to real problems such as war, genocide, the AIDS crisis, abuse of children...”
- Many members of a group hadn’t been aware of Primacy of Conscience, that it is our highest moral authority.
- There is concern that we are becoming polarized in the church. Are we missing the real call of the Church? Are we becoming a community that is separate from the rest of the Church?
- It was noted that the last small group summary sheet revealed many of the groups had some of the same concerns, values and discussion points.

**Suggestions for Parish Renewal**

Once again, facilitators were asked to provide suggestions or recommended values that would benefit our parish. The following were submitted after session three:

- It was suggested that we continue our emphasis on the Beatitudes rather than the Commandments.
- We should use the new Gathering space shelves to share relevant books among community members.
- One group suggested that we reach out to our Islamic neighbors with some social opportunity that may lead to working together on common projects and promote understanding.
- It was also suggested that we have more opportunities for small groups after our Year of Renewal.
- There is the belief that we are aware of what it means to be Catholic at SJF – now we should find a way to effectively take it outside of SJF.
- It was noted that this kind of discussion benefits our Parish, but the group questioned how many people in our Parish are open to this since there are so many people who are not involved.
- This group also wondered how many other Catholic Churches would be open to this kind of discussion.

