



Small Group Report Summary—Week Two

Most of the Year of Renewal small discussion groups have completed their second session and the group facilitators have provided input regarding these sessions. As with the first session, this input is in three areas: Key insights, discussion surprises, and suggestions for the SJF parish.

Key Insights and Experiences

Listed below are the key insights expressed during the second discussion as provided by the group facilitators. Like the first session summary, some modifications to shorten the text or to provide consistency of language have taken place.

- What matters is how you help others, "...it's not what you gather, it's what you scatter..."
- Two groups highlighted the fact that God is best known, felt, and perceived in community, "if I can't find God in you, then God can't be found..." Everyone needs one another.
- One member of a group described how she had the opportunity to apply the lesson of Bartimaeus to a work situation, with amazing results.
- One group had an interesting discussion on the different perceptions of Church and Church practices based on background and/or age differences.
- God's call in this (SJF) community is through our jobs (working w/ public is a service) and serving on committees or chairing events.
- Issues in our Church include immigration, abortion and healthcare among others.
- One group believes "outsiders" say about our community: "Priest scandals" are a major problem, we don't say the Creed during Mass (at SJF) and we aren't more involved in larger Catholic issues.
- Participants of a group described their faith as part of a life journey that is personal. They are from different walks of life, but found a home at SJF. They are concerned about the future of the church, particularly as it is reflected in their individual families. Many have moved to different parts of the country where they are searching for an experience similar to SJF.
- We must acknowledge the need to recognize our individual prejudices when "seeing" God within our community (SJF, workplace, neighborhood, extended family, etc.).
- We must also acknowledge the unique treasure we have in our SJFC experience as a community of worship and should contemplate changes in the community structure that might occur in the near and distant future.
- One of the small groups dealt with questions about our faith including issues with the purpose of lay ministers, the possible ordination of women, the possible ordination of married priests, the acceptance of gay parishioners, the inadequate response to sexual abuse by clergy and the unfair focus on Catholic clergy in media.
- It was mentioned by one group that social/moral issues are difficult to discuss in a parish setting.
- We have many experiences but we don't take the time to find the meaning of those experiences.
- One group feels that there is a disconnect between us (the people of the Church) and Rome (the leaders of the Church).
- "When I think of the church, I do think of myself."
- Each group member (of one group) has been called by the community to go beyond their competencies – either by performing community service or participating in parish ministries.
- Outsiders have positive experiences in our church because the spirit is recognized here.
- Per one group, Faith Formation needs to be a higher priority. If the children are the future of the church, their classes should not change location or be cancelled, etc.
- The singing of foreign language hymns was questioned by one group. We have gotten away from Latin. Why do we now want to substitute other languages?
- The admission of married Episcopal and Anglican priests to the Roman Rite raised the question about why that can't become the norm in the Roman Rite.
- There was group consensus that we are here not for ourselves but for others.

- *Understanding the discernment process is very difficult. It is important to be a good listener during the process. Sometimes the discernment process is much more clear when one hears many different points of view and compares them to one's own life experiences.*
- Historically, the Catholic Church has been slow to change. Are the rituals/rules causing us to lose the real message about what our faith is all about?

Surprises

As mentioned after the first session, there are often surprises or revelations that result from small group discussions. Following are the items that the small group facilitators reported as surprises:

- It was observed by one facilitator that the booklets and topics need not be heavy in theology to be meaningful.
- In one group, three participants came to the discussion having been through RCIA. Three others have been through 12 or more years of Catholic education. Interestingly, all had similar points of view. Their faith is enriched not by rules, but by the experience of a personal relationship nurtured by the SJF community.
- Another observation is that we need to reach out to others, not just the poor or homeless, but also to those around us: Our neighbors, our families, our friends.
- A group discussed early church teachings on married priests. Every group member felt married priests would be an asset to the church. Marriage offers a level of understanding of daily issues and concerns which can help priests counsel parishioners.
- When one member of a group commented on singing hymns in other languages, the rest of the group found it surprising that the older members agreed that this is an English-speaking country and our ancestors immediately set about trying to learn the language to fit in and become American, while our younger members didn't seem to have any problems with singing in Spanish and had not experienced immigrants wanting to "be American."
- Many of the members of one group had difficulty understanding the message/direction of the booklet. Most had attended Sr. Connie's presentation, but could not understand the correlation between the discernment process and the booklet. The booklet was re-read out loud at the start of the session, which helped with clarity and to get the discussion going.

Suggestions for Parish Renewal

Facilitators were also asked to provide any suggestions or recommended values that would benefit the parish. Highlights of those submitted as a result of the second session discussions are as follows:

- It was mentioned that, unlike the "big bible churches," the sacraments of the Catholic Church are an enriching experience. We (the Church) must find a way to convey this to others.
- There is a need for discussion to plan for the future of our parish (Fr. Jerry's retirement) even though it (retirement) is hopefully a long way off. Discussions should start now.
- It was suggested that the group meetings be extended beyond the planned 6 sessions. We should consider inviting new members including those outside of our faith community. Catholicism is not an island; we need to work with other believers for the Highest Good.
- There is a need to create a place where we can form our conscience and not feel threatened and defensive about our opinions and beliefs.
- One group wants more discussion on institutional "Church" vs. church as a community, the Body of Christ.
- Many members of one group feel that what it means to be Catholic for them has changed over the years, based on their involvement with the SJF community. Belief that we are indeed the Body of Christ, and the more we build our relationships with each other and continue our outreach to others, the better able we will be to carry Christ's message into the world today.
- Finally, one group commented that the Year of Renewal is well thought out and recognized the amount of planning done in advance of the rollout to the community. The homilies, written materials and booklets, speakers at the Tuesday evening gatherings, even the reporting forms provide a good guide through the process. No improvement is needed at this point.