



**Gracious God**, you are our Maker, Keeper and Lover. Your goodness embodies each one of us. Help us to appreciate you in one another and to recognize that all we do flows from your generosity and creativity working in and through our lives. During this year of renewal, we ask that you will change us! Help us to BE Christ in this world, bringing light to the darkness, hope to despair, trust to uncertainty and new life to devastation. Strengthen our commitment to do your work in our homes, in our parish, in our community and in our world. We pray with sincere hearts and open minds, in your name, O God. Amen.

NOVEMBER 14/15, 2009



**VISION:**

Finding deeper meaning in our relationships and our Catholic Faith

**VALUES:**

- Personal and Community Growth
- Relevancy of faith in our daily lives
- Relationship to God and one another

**MISSION:**

Provide opportunities to:

- Experience growth and relevancy of our Catholic faith as individuals and as a community.
- Relate the Year of Renewal experience to the entire SJF Community.
- Build and celebrate community.

ST. JOHN FISHER CHAPEL UNIVERSITY PARISH

# What is the year of Renewal at St. John Fisher?

*In the biblical tradition, every seven years the Jewish people celebrated a “Sabbath” year. It was an opportunity to start over, correcting the failures of the past and committing to a better future. For Christians, we have that opportunity to celebrate a Sabbath every week.*

*The year of renewal provides a time to read, think, share, and celebrate who we are as believers. We will have the opportunity to step back from our usual Church participation and take a look at some fundamentals in our faith.*

*We will invite all of our SJF community members to set aside quality time to consider a few aspects of our faith. You may discover some ideas that you want to think about or talk about. You may find that you are called to set aside some ideas that you have held for years.*

*We ask that you pray before and after you read these brief articles and that you listen with openness and expectation to each other. It is in this openness to the printed material and in your discussions with each other that your own personal faith will be deepened and enriched.*

*Finally, as a community, may we discover a renewed Word of God for our world today.*

## Weekend DATES

The program is centered around six weekends (plus a Tuesday follow-up) through 2010. Small groups will gather on other days after the Year of Renewal (YOR) weekends.

**Fall Theme: God's Presence and Call:**

**Oct. 3-4:** In my personal life.

**Oct. 24-25:** In my personal life related to community.

**Nov. 14-15:** In my personal life as a member of the larger community.

**Winter theme: My/Our response to God's Presence and Call:**

**Feb. 6-7:** My response as an individual.

**Feb. 27-28:** My/Our response as belonging to a community.

**March 20-21:** As individuals and as a community.

## Opening PRAYER

Let us Pray ... We take a few moments of silence to ask God to open our minds and hearts and to gift us with deeper wisdom and understanding.

Small sharing groups are encouraged to begin their session by reading the booklet, together or individually, before they begin sharing.

# REFLECTION

Personal

How would I rate my appreciation for and loyalty to the Church? Am I willing to invest energy into study and efforts to reform the Church? Have I investigated this Church? Have I ever been disappointed in the Church?

## Introduction

**I**n our first discussion booklet, we focused on our relationship with God, asking if it has developed, if we ever talked about it, whether it had changed. Our second discussion, treated the blind beggar Bartimaeus, and the disciples' own blindness in seeing those on the margin. We asked ourselves if we, also, were blind to those on the margins.

In the readings for the third week, we hear dire predictions which apparently point to the end of the world with references to unsurpassed distress with the promise of salvation for a few. The Gospel presents Jesus' warnings about the end times and watching for the signs. In reality, that reading from Mark's Gospel is a reference to the destruction of the Jewish temple which occurred in 70 AD. For the Jewish people, the temple had been their badge of honor, symbolizing their superiority among other nations. But it didn't survive.

## Destruction of Our Temples

**L**et us pose this subject for consideration: what are the temples we have built, edifices which, under duress, will fall? Sometimes a religion is a set of external observances, but lacking genuine spirit.

Have we or others created a temple out of our religion? Have we placed emphases on things that are not essential, on things which, in the last analysis, are peripheral? Is our religion a temple that attracts only the well scrubbed, the well off, the well educated, and the righteous? Is our religion a cause for self satisfaction in comparison with others. Jesus ate with the religious people *and* the sinners. The irony is this: we can't always be sure which is the sinner and which is the saint.

## The Long History of the Catholic Church

**A** Church with a long history has a long record, both good and bad. It has made mistakes (a matter of public record); it has corrected them though usually not very quickly. (Galileo celebrated his exoneration from heaven some 400 years after the Church's error.) Granted, given its global presence and organization, renewal in the Catholic Church happens slowly, but it is inevitable; just as when a baby is about to be born, nothing can stop the entrance of that new life. So, what is there about our faith that is bigger, deeper, truer, and holier that has allowed it to, not only survive these crises, but to arise reformed, renewed, enlivened to regroup for a new day?



## Some Fundamental Treasures of the Church

**The Principle of Sacramentality:** Believing is seeing. Our belief prompts us to look deeply at life and experience. Just as in every celebration of a Sacrament, especially the Eucharist, we believe that God is present and active in the ritual, we also believe that *everything* reveals God to us. Everything is more than it seems. The Talmud (a collection of ancient Jewish writings) captures the active presence of God in the poetic quote, “Over every blade of grass, there is an angel whispering, ‘Grow, grow.’ ”

**Liturgical Traditions:** In addition to the Scriptures, our worship involves ritual and symbol, with the potential to draw us into extraordinary religious experiences. Ritual changes hearts as it engages our senses.

**Primacy of Conscience:** While upholding essential values, the Church acknowledges that the individual person’s highest right and responsibility is to exercise freedom of conscience, and that a grey area exists in the real life decisions. Once prayerfully and carefully formed, conscience is our highest moral authority.

**Philosophical Foundation:** A significant and reliable reality is that our tradition continues to have a substantial philosophical foundation that has provided a compass for theological developments. Reason and intellect provide a dependable backdrop to our teachings and their ongoing development.

At any time moment we might recognize lapses in some of these values, but ultimately they prevail.



## Wisdom and Models of the Church

**The** Church has acquired massive experience and a storehouse of wisdom, scholarship and self understanding. Using a circle of theological reflection and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, the Church looks at experience, reflects on it, interfaces that experience with Scripture and Tradition, discovers a development in the tradition, and then applies it to new experiences, etc. Input is everywhere as the Church grows in its self understanding. Some of these developments include spiritual leadership, monastic and religious life, missionary vision, calls to justice and peace.

Avery Dulles, S.J. assembled a list of the self understandings of the Church based on its experience. Following is a list of those understandings along with the primary emphasis of each:

Church Model	Primary Mission
Institution	Maintain hierarchical governance
Communion	Foster community in the Body of Christ
Sacrament	Make God’s presence visible in the world
Herald	Proclaim the Gospel
Servant	Stand with the poor and oppressed of society
Community of Disciples	Constantly engage in learning



## Another Image of the Church

**Consider** a large family home on a sizable tract of land. It has been in the family’s history for several generations. The structure itself has undergone renovations, additions, demolitions,

(some of the workmanship better than others). Relatives still assemble at this homestead for family celebrations: holiday dinners, births, farewell parties, funeral gatherings, casual visits and coming together to resolve family problems. Nearby is a family cemetery, remembrance of those who have gone before them.

The family home contains treasures that may have been unappreciated. That heritage is still there for the discovery. In the course of its long history, some have moved to other places on the property and built new homes with modern improvements.

Family homecomings restore identity, recall stories, celebrate victories, mend failures, heal hurts, and refresh the members' hope as they move back into daily life. Each homecoming is another opportunity to appreciate and celebrate the family.

**The power of homecoming is expressed well by TS Eliot:**

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.

*Little Gidding, 1943*



**Jesuit** theologian, Walter Burghardt's baptism homily on the occasion of welcoming baby Sonia Marie into the Church goes far in capturing just why it is that people continue to call themselves Catholic, to worship, to believe, to belong:

Sonia Marie, before we welcome you through symbol and ritual into the paradoxical people, this community of contradictions, let me make an uncommonly honest confession. In the course

of half a century (and more), I have seen more Catholic corruption than most Catholics read of. I have tasted it. I have been reasonably corrupt myself. And yet I take joy in this Church, this living, throbbing, sinning people of God; I love it with a crucifying passion. Why? For all the Catholic hate, I experience here a community of *love*. For all the institutional idiocy, I find here a tradition of *reason*. For all the individual repressions, I breathe here an air of *freedom*. For all the fear of sex, I discover here the redemption of my *body*. In an age so inhuman, I touch here the tears of *compassion*. In a world so grim and humorless, I share here rich joy and earthly *laughter*. In the midst of death, I hear here an incomparable stress on *life*. For all the apparent absence of God, I sense here the presence of *Christ*.

Can we love this Church into its full potential? Have we built a temple subject to destruction or do we have a living Church community?

## The Catholic Church TEACHES

By Christ's obedience and love, our relationship with God was restored. Thus, too, Christ's realm here on earth, which is fully present but seldom recognized, grows brighter and more visible as God's power unfolds. Celebrating Eucharist over and over allows this power to unfold in the world and brings about our salvation. Celebrating Eucharist over and over forms the Body of Christ, a unity into which everyone on earth is welcomed, a unity in Christ who is the Light of the World. *Lumen Gentium!*

*(The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: Vatican II in Plain English)*

# The Catholic Church CELEBRATES

In many Christian churches there is a celebration of “communion,” which *recalls* the historical last supper. In the Catholic celebration, the Eucharist makes the last supper of Jesus *present* (bringing the historical event into the present moment). Jesus’ supper is present *now!* We celebrate – not just an event from the life of Jesus – but that event is *current* in our celebration of the Eucharist.

## Small Group SHARING

The theologian, Karl Rahner, S.J. envisions a time when the Catholic Church will be smaller, but stronger, more intense, more willing to give up its life for the Gospel. Reflect on the quality / quantity tension.

The Church is responsible for preaching the Word, forming community, serving the world – especially the poor, and celebrating the Resurrection of Jesus in the Eucharist. What are our strengths and weaknesses?

## Closing PRAYER

Conclude this time by reflecting on the Year of Renewal prayer. (See back page.)

## A Faith to Believe In

Song for the St John Fisher Year of Renewal

Terry Gonda & Kirsti Reeve

$\text{♩} = 114$

We're long-ing for You to deep - en our\_\_ faith Draw us in clo-ser through love\_\_  
 4  
 - and through grace. Re - new us, trans-form us, con - nect us as one. So  
 7  
 10 we may con - tin - ue the work\_\_ of Your Son\_\_ We're  
 seek - ing deep - er mean - ing\_\_ And a faith to be - lieve\_\_ in\_\_

Verses (One for each weekend):

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Like little children, we come to You<br>Help us to open our hearts<br>To notice Your presence in all that we do<br>Make us aware of Your call           | 4. Like Simon Peter, abandoning all<br>Help us cling only to You<br>Here we are, ready to answer Your call<br>Leaving our nets on the shore                    |
| 2. Like Bartimeus, we want to see<br>Help us to open our eyes<br>Finding Your call to community<br>In every part of our lives                              | 5. Like the disciples, in awe and in fear,<br>As Your glory transfigures all<br>It is indeed good for us to be here<br>May we respond to Your call             |
| 3. Lord, when uncertainty hits from all sides<br>Help us keep trusting in You<br>Keep us alert to the signs of the times<br>For only Your call will endure | 6. Just like the Pharisees, we're quick to judge<br>Help us to put down our stones<br>And walk a new road of forgiveness and love<br>Knowing we're never alone |

Final Refrain:

We're longing for You to deepen our faith  
 Draw us in closer through love and through grace  
 Renew us, transform us, connect us as one  
 So we may continue the work of Your Son  
 We're seeking deeper meaning, and a faith to believe in  
 We're **finding** deeper meaning ... And a faith to believe in

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