

My Fellow Disciples,

Responding to Cardinal Cupich's *Renew My Church* initiative for the Archdiocese of Chicago to make our parishes vibrant and sustainable communities for our people today and for generations to come, St. Joseph's Libertyville is reimagining itself as a community of communities by instituting a new dimension of church, ***Community for the Kingdom***. This ministry is comprised of small groups of parishioners who gather regularly in their homes to experience face-to-face relationships while connecting with Christ's proclamation of the Kingdom.



After Vatican II, the Latin American church developed small faith communities like the ones St. Joseph's is initiating. Subsequently, they spread to the African and Asian churches and have been a tremendous success. Now Pope Francis wants to make these small communities the pastoral priority for the universal church.

Today, I am delighted to introduce this new pastoral priority for our parish. Prayerful discernment and research has informed this decision and ***Community for the Kingdom*** should be greatly beneficial for the spiritual growth of our parish. These home-based groups will facilitate deeper relationships within the community and generate action that ultimately benefits our neighbors who may need to experience God's love through us.

I encourage you to attend three informational sessions to learn more about ***Community for the Kingdom***.

Session 1, Tuesday, October 3, 2017, 7-9 p.m., Koenig Center: Fr. John Trout, Pastor of St. Joseph Catholic Church, will present the history of small faith communities in the early Church and contemporary examples of them. Discover the benefits, relevance and impact a small faith community can have in the world.

Session 2, Tuesday, October 10, 2017, 7-9 p.m., Koenig Center: Fr. John Kartje, Rector of University of St. Mary of the Lake, will present how to break open the Word in a small faith community. Learn how to engage with Scripture by reading and responding to biblical passages.

Session 3, Tuesday, October 17, 2017, 7-9 p.m., Koenig Center: Dr. Robert O'Gorman, Professor Emeritus at Loyola University, will discuss the connections between Scripture, small faith communities, and social justice. Understand how a compassionate community brings about the Kingdom of God in the world.

On the next two pages are additional details on ***Community for the Kingdom***. I hope you accept this invitation to explore this new pastoral priority for our parish.

With gratitude for your discipleship,

A handwritten signature in green ink that reads "Fr. John Trout". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Fr. John Trout

Community for the Kingdom

Vision: Individuals gathering in small family groups in homes to strengthen their relationship with Christ and each other, and to build compassionate communities to bring about the Kingdom of God in the world.

Background:

- Jesus, in order to fulfill His mission, formed the first community for the Kingdom when He called His twelve Apostles.
- This first community for the Kingdom was recreated by Christ by His post-Resurrection appearances to His Apostles and disciples (e.g. His appearance to the two disciples on their way to Emmaus).
- This first community for the Kingdom became the model (“home churches”) for the early Church of the Apostles and their immediate successors.
- St. Paul’s epistles were addressed to such small local communities.
- A significant influence on the reforms of the Second Vatican Council was the theology of “ressourcement” or return to the biblical, patristic, and liturgical practices of the early Church (e.g. *home churches*) as a means of revitalization of the modern Church.
- The Second Vatican Council’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium) states: This Church of Christ is really present in all legitimately organized *local* groups of the faithful, which in so far as they are united to their pastors, are quite appropriately the new people called by God, in the power of the Holy Spirit ... In these communities, though they may often be *small* and poor, or existing in the diaspora, Christ is present through whose power and influence the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church is constituted.
- Both Pope Francis and Cardinal Cupich are passionate about revitalizing the Church. With the Holy Father’s emphasis on compassionate communities and the Archbishop’s emphasis on the renewal of the Chicago Archdiocese through mission and discipleship, **Community for the Kingdom** thus becomes a pastoral priority for the Universal and the local church.

Objectives: To recreate the experience of the two disciples on their way Emmaus. That is:

1. To foster an awareness of the presence of the Risen Lord in the people and events of everyday life, thus testifying that Jesus truly lives in the community of His followers. (“Jesus himself drew near and walked with them.” LK 24:15.)
2. To encourage living in the light of the Word of God. (“Were not our hearts burning within us while He spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?” LK 24:32.) Collective contemplation of the Word of God is the foundation of the small faith community.

Thus, becoming aware of Christ’s ongoing presence and being formed by the Gospel, members of the small faith groups are led to the acceptance of responsibility for the social needs of the larger community.

Why this and Why now?

1. To deepen and support a relationship with Jesus.
2. To satisfy the hunger for relationships that provide learning and unconditional acceptance.
3. To establish a greater sense of community and belonging.
4. To provide a way for families to strengthen their faith together.
5. Because our Pastor and the Parish Pastoral Council, after studying for the past year this new framework for the Community for the Kingdom, prayerfully discerned that it would be greatly beneficial for the spiritual growth of the parish.

Benefits for the Parish:

1. It is an opportunity to make our faith and the Gospel the center of every parishioner's life.
2. It inspires discipleship and fosters a vitality of mission which is the vision of the Archdiocesan program *Renew Our Church*.
3. It provides new leadership roles for the laity.
4. It engages families, couples, and individuals, young and old.
5. It accelerates growth in the participation of the sacramental life of the Church.
6. It achieves the Holy Father's mission for each of us to deepen our personal relationship with Jesus Christ and with each other and to become a community of disciples who have compassion for the last, the least, and the lowly.

What does a Community for the Kingdom look like?

1. The parish will provide a defined structure and process for forming and sustaining the small faith groups of the ***Community for the Kingdom***.
2. Small faith groups will be composed of individuals and 5 to 7 families (couples).
3. Small groups will meet in a family home regularly (i.e. at least once a month).
4. Each small group will have a Host family and a trained facilitator.
5. Each small group gathering will include:
 - a) Welcome: Welcoming Christ into the midst of the small community gathering.
 - b) Reading: Reading Scripture/hearing God's Word proclaimed.
 - c) Abiding: Allowing time for Christ to speak within the group.
 - d) Silence: Becoming aware of God's presence within the group.
 - e) Sharing: Sharing what God is saying through each member of the group.
 - f) Action: Allowing time for the group to be inspired by God's collective message. Discerning the purpose for which the group is to be sent.
 - g) Prayer: Placing before God in prayer all that was received, expressed, discussed, and discerned.

Characteristics of the Community for the Kingdom:

1. It provides an environment in which to grow in faith as followers of Christ, while jointly entering into a deeper experience of fellowship.
2. It deepens and supports a personal relationship with Jesus.
3. It unites us with the Word of God which becomes a guiding life principle.
4. It is a place of common prayer.
5. It is a place of sharing and solidarity where human hardships are taken seriously.
6. It is an additional ministry program that does not replace existing ministries or programs in the parish, but can revitalize them.