

Building Community in Prayer Groups

November 3, 2014

Compiled by Maurice Blumberg

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A. **Recommended Books/Booklet**

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1. The Bond of Love

by Aggie Neck

One of the distinct characteristics of baptism in the Holy Spirit is the desire to be with people who have had the same experience. There is a common thread, a denominator, that common trait, that unites us and a bond of love that surpasses just friendship. It is a holy attraction that transcends the boundaries of social ranking, or economic standing. There is a strong desire to be together. Even when we encounter each other in different settings there is joy in the encounter. We have become the body of Christ. What a transformation this is! St. Paul tells us “The old order has passed away now all is new” (2 Cor. 5:17).

Webster’s Dictionary defines community as: a unified body of individuals; a group linked by a common policy; and fellowship. This is who we are and who we are called to be, that unified body with a purpose and a goal.

As much as we love the people in our prayer groups, community goes beyond the local bond of fellowship. No matter where we go, when we are with those who have had the experience of baptism in the Holy Spirit we are drawn together in holy fellowship. We have accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord, we have become aware of the love of God the Father for us, and the focus of our lives has changed as we allow the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us. There is now a meaning to life that goes beyond the day-to-day routine. In his writing St. Paul points out to us that we now have a hope and a destiny: “life on high in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14). This unites us as a community of believers.

St. Paul continues to inspire us with scripture that helps us to know what our role is in the community of those who follow Jesus. One of my favorites is in Colossians 3:12-17. It has the subtitle “The Practice of Virtues.” “Because you are God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with heartfelt mercy, with kindness, humility, meekness and patience. Bear with one another; forgive whatever grievances you have against one another. Forgive as the Lord has forgiven you. Over all these virtues put on love which binds the rest together and makes them perfect. Christ’s peace must reign in your hearts, since as members of the one body you have been called to that peace. Dedicate yourselves to thankfulness. Let the word of Christ, rich as it is, dwell in you. In wisdom made perfect instruct and admonish one another. Sing gratefully to God from your hearts in psalms, hymns, and inspired songs. Whatever you do, whether in speech or in action, do it in the name of the Lord Jesus. Give thanks to God the Father through him.”

These instructions are the definition of community at its best. When we have been able to perfect these virtues among us, we will indeed be a unified body of individuals, a group linked by common policy and fellowship. We will have become the Body of Christ in its fullness. It would be the Kingdom of God on earth

Source: July/August/September 2008 PENTECOST *Today*

2. Excerpts from Articles in *PENTECOST Today* and NSC Newsletter

Baptism in the Holy Spirit and Community

by Steve Clark

Sometimes people say that those with a renewed Christian life seek one another out for support and personal help in living the renewed Christian life. That is certainly an aspect of it, but there is more to it. They seek others out because they need others to live the Christian life.

Christianity is something that you live with others. Even those of us born into societies as individualistic as modern American society can see that the scripture teaches that Christian life is something you do with others. And the ages of Christian history confirm that. John, speaking to the Christians of the communities he worked with exhorted them to love one another (1 Jn. 4:7, 11), and renewed Christians respond to that word readily

Source: July/August/September 2008 *PENTECOST Today*

A Vision for Today's Prayer Groups

by Sister Nancy Kellar, SC

We are called to be one and to call others into unity. "Father, may they be one even as we are one" (Jn. 7:11). Life in the Holy Spirit taught us that community is an essential part of Pentecost and that we can't grow in relationship to God unless we are growing in relationship with one another. The Spirit teaches us that joy comes from putting the needs of others ahead of ourselves, that other centeredness makes us better individuals. We learn the paradox that in losing ourselves, we find new life.

In contrast, modern culture teaches that salvation comes from self-realization, self-help, that success equals individualism and independence. "I'll do it my way." Society calls sin in relationships "personality clashes" that are irreconcilable.

In the Spirit we learn the possibility of hearts changing, of reconciliation, of unity in diversity. We are called to prophetically proclaim that in the Spirit unity between races, genders, age groups, and religions is possible.

Source: April/May/June 2008 *PENTECOST Today*

Vision for Prayer Groups

by David Thorp

Caring and sharing relationships. Part of the vision from the Lord is helping people to grow with one another—in family life, at work, within the life of the prayer group. The vision of God is not for us to have a private relationship with him. At the core of our life with God is relationship with others that mirror God's own life as Trinity. How are we helping prayer group members to have caring and sharing relationships with family members, with neighbors and co-workers?

Source: May/June/July/August 2004 *PENTECOST Today*

Rebuild Healthy Prayer Groups

by Sr. Nancy Kellar, S.C.

The Lord wants to turn up the dimmer and release the power of the Spirit in new and wondrous ways, because he wants to make us a people; he wants to make us one. There are two aspects to unity, unity of heart and unity of mind. Healthy relationships among the leaders is a key to maintaining healthy prayer groups. .

.The third mark of a charismatic prayer group is a growing sense of being brothers and sisters. Just as we need to share our lives as leaders, we need to help prayer group members move into situations where they can share their lives. Start small sharing groups and/or have informal gatherings, potluck suppers or picnic. Where people are meeting and sharing their lives, the praise and worship at a prayer meeting is strong. People need to have a sense of belonging and they are free to share.

Source: NSC Newsletter, Volume 11, No. 2 February 1986

The Beans are Burning!

by Sr. Martha Jean McGarry,

It is a community of God's love where we learn to grow together as members of one body giving glory to God by our acceptance and love of one another, our support of each other in need, our encouragement of one another to be fully alive in Jesus Christ and to be living witnesses of God's love for all people. Our sense of community is broadened as we encompass the needs of others in our prayer, our outreaches of kindness, and above all in the Holy Spirit Seminars we provide regularly. When was the last time you offered a Life in the Spirit Seminar? Does love make your group grow, spiritually and numerically?

Source: January/February/March 2003 PENTECOST *Today*

Aging and Disappearing Prayer Groups: God's Desire, or Our Need for Fresh Fire?

By Deacon Chuck Matzker

Are we really Community? Life in the Spirit is best fostered in community where people support and care for one another. Do we welcome the stranger and invite him or her to be a part of us, to serve with us? Can we call ourselves "a charismatic community, a 'body of Christ with a mission?" or are we simply a "once a week" prayer meeting—a revolving door of IN and OUT?

...

Conscious and continual community building is absolutely vital. For example, make hospitality a priority at the prayer meeting: greet and recognize newcomers; send cards to those who are ill or have had a significant life event; call or send cards to those who have not attended in a while; have monthly pastoral team meetings; quarterly CORE (regular attendee) meetings; frequent teachings on the group's mission; retreats; community events (game nights, picnics, etc.); invite *all* into some ministry in the prayer group (use them or lose them); invite people to attend Charismatic Conferences to see the big picture; and much more!

Source: July/August/September 2009 PENTECOST *Today*

3. Charisms and Community Building

by Fr. Bob Hogan

Charisms (spiritual gifts) are a treasure in the Church. How do we make sure that they do not become "fool's gold" without the full, lasting value that God desires? I believe that the answer is found in a renewed effort to "build community" in our prayer groups.

Community building is essential for those seeking the lasting, fruitful use of charisms in the Church. The idea of charisms is exciting. We want to see "manifestations of the Spirit" in our lives (1 Cor. 12: 7). It is wonderful to see God's presence made visible by charisms that awaken faith, demonstrate that God is in our midst, and build up the Church (1 Cor. 14: 4, 12, 25-26). The Charismatic Renewal is an important reminder that God's work is not done only with our human abilities, but with charisms that manifest God's power, love and wisdom (1 Tim. 1: 6-7).

However, the focus of the early Church was not only, or mainly, on individual charisms. God manifested the Holy Spirit's presence through the witness of a committed, united community. Act 2: 42-47 describes the Jerusalem disciples after Pentecost: "They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles, and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers...to meeting together in the temple area and breaking bread in their homes...and every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved." Steven Clark writes: "No doubt there was individual evangelism, but the account in Acts 2 emphasizes that it was their life together that impacted others. The result of the outpouring of the Spirit was a community living "in the Spirit," and this drew others to the Lord" (Charismatic Spirituality, p. 27). The community itself was a manifestation of the Spirit, a charism. St. Paul confirms this truth by regularly describing charisms in the context of being a committed, united community, the "body of Christ" (Rom. 12: 3-8; 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4: 1-16).

What does this mean for prayer groups? We must "strive eagerly" (1 Cor. 12: 31; 14: 1, 12) for the charism of "community building." People should witness a "togetherness" in the Spirit that manifests God's presence. Here are some suggestions for growing in this charism in prayer groups:

- 1) Pray together for the desire to be a community like Acts 2, that witnesses the presence of the Spirit, bringing others to Jesus Christ.
- 2) Pray for the community building charisms of pastoring, administration, wisdom, encouragement, hospitality, communal vision, practical teaching on relationships, etc.
- 3) Pray for the grace to "think collectively" and "see connections," so that people do not think only of their own desires and gifts, but learn to interrelate with others and complement each other. Teach about these abilities and practice them in your groups.
- 4) Have a yearly group plan that includes regular community building activities: one-to-one sharing where people can share their background and testimony; teachings on "working collectively," communication skills and group dynamics; "small group" sharing about one area of growth and one area of challenge in each person's life; socializing together. Spend time helping people to get to know each other and grow in spiritual bonds of friendship.
- 5) Ask the Lord what persons and groups he wants you to be relating with in a committed way. Start with family and parish community, but also, smaller groups where you can share your faith journey.

As St. Paul teaches, we grow in maturity in Christ when we are in committed relationship^ where "living the truth in love, we should grow in every way into him who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, with the proper functioning of each part, brings about the body's growth and builds itself up in love" (Eph. 4: 15-16).

Source: October/November/December 2007 *PENTECOST Today*

4. Building Community in Prayer Groups

By Graham N. Smith

When it comes to seeing God move powerfully among His people, I'm really struck by Acts 2:42-47 and Acts 4:32-35. The early Christians in Jerusalem were of "one heart and mind." They shared their lives and whatever material things God had given them. They devoted themselves to teaching, prayer and the communal life. Great signs and wonders were done in their midst. They were filled with joy and every day the Lord drew more to join them. Who wouldn't want to be part of that?

I'm convinced that one of the reasons for the vibrant life that the Jerusalem community had was that they *were* community. Because they were of "one heart and mind," they shared a common vision of what God wanted to do. When you've got that, God's love flows in your midst and He can do wonderful things.

"God manifested the Holy Spirit's presence through the witness of a committed, united community," National Service Committee Chairman Fr. Bob Hogan observes. He sees building community as one of the main focuses that a charismatic prayer group should have. Chances are, that's going to require serious change in how we do "prayer meeting."

"Community" is related to two other words: "common" and "unity." We have to be willing to invest a lot of time and effort in building a strong sense of unity in our prayer groups so that we begin to think and act like a "people of God" instead of folks who come together once a week to pray for a couple of hours. We need to find ways to share more of our lives with each other. The more we do that, the more community we're likely to see rising among us.

For most of us, that won't mean the highly-structured life of a covenant community, but it will mean working on deeper relationships with each other. Here's a good tip I was given long ago: look for ways to "waste time together." That goes against our busy culture, but it's very practical advice.

For us, that translated to things like trips by all our families to a nearby zoo, getting together for board games, picnics, and gathering with other groups for a day of outdoor sports. Sometimes, the men would get together and help paint a room at someone's house. Basically, we were doing the kinds of things that an extended family might do.

Some of my most cherished "community building" memories are from times when our prayer group just "went away." We started a three-day "Mardi Gras Getaway." Kids and all, we'd head for a retreat center in the woods to sing, do skits, play games, pray, and just have fun together. We liked it so much that we made it an annual event, and after a few years we started having another "getaway" at a state park right before the fall school term began. We shared the meal-making and housekeeping duties, took turns leading some praise songs before each meal, and had a great time just being a "people of the Lord" for a few days. I recommend it highly!

Another good way to deepen relationships is to meet in homes. Former NSC Council member Narciso "Al" Albarracin is a long-time member of a home-based charismatic prayer group in Columbus, Ohio. Their meetings are small, typically about seven families. Al's group meets on weekend afternoons and ends with dinner and fellowship. He sees great advantages in gathering in members' homes.

“There is a warmth and a welcoming atmosphere in a prayer meeting held in a home,” Al says. He finds it easier to invite potential new members to a home instead of to a meeting at a parish church. Because the meetings are on weekends, people arrive more rested than they would be if they were coming after a busy workday. Unlike weeknight prayer meetings, these gatherings don't have a firm time limit, so people have a chance to get to know each other better. And to Al, that common meal at the end is invaluable. “Breaking bread together and fellowship never fail to tighten and maintain the bond among members and deepen each other's familiarity with each other's lives,” Al says, “their joys, troubles, sorrows, children, aging parents, jobs, challenges, and all.”

That's sharing life!

A home-based prayer meeting also gives the host family the blessing of rendering hospitality. For 11 years, my wife Donna and I were part of one that rotated among several homes and sometimes drew sixty, seventy people or more. It's amazing how many can fit into a house when Jesus brings them! We'd begin with a “Lord's Day Meal.” People “brown-bagged” it and there was always enough food to go around.

We met in parish facilities a few times, but like Al, we found meeting in homes a much more inviting experience. Give it a try. You may never go back to the parish hall!

For new groups, it might be good to plant the idea of community “from the ground up” during a Life in the Spirit Seminar, or whatever other vehicle we use to evangelize and pray for people to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. That's the approach taken by Couples for Christ, which began in the Philippines in 1981 to evangelize married couples. Now, it's worldwide and ministers to singles and widows as well as to husbands and wives.

They're very much a charismatic group. CFC's initial formation includes many of the same topics that we cover in a Life in the Spirit Seminar. The participants are all prayed with to stir up the gifts and charisms of the Holy Spirit, but there are additional sessions that are aimed at strengthening the family and laying the foundation for community life. Like the group that Al is part of, CFC groups often meet in homes and include a meal in their gatherings. (During the winter, Al and his wife Terri leave Ohio for Florida, where they're part of a CFC group.)

Former NSC member Chuck Hornsby of Alleluia Community has another practical suggestion to build community: a 24 hour, 7 day a week prayer watch whose members are drawn from different prayer groups in the area. Or, they can come from one prayer group if it's large enough. “Prayer,” Chuck says, “not only gives us contact with God, but it solidifies the people that are praying together.” It draws them closer to each other. “Just begin to pray about how God's going to link you together, and how God's going to use you together,” Chuck says. “God'll do something!”

Chuck's put together more thoughts on building community in prayer groups in *“Relationship by Design: Prayer Meetings, Prayer Groups and Communities”*,¹ a leaflet available at www.nsc-chariscenter.org.

Fr. Bob Hogan sees the Jerusalem community in Acts 2 as a charism of the Spirit, and says that we leaders need to “strive eagerly” for the charism of “community building.” He believes that we need to pray for the desire to be a community like the one in Jerusalem, witnessing to the presence of the Spirit and bringing others to Jesus, and for the gifts needed to build it. You can find more of

¹ <http://www.nsc-chariscenter.org/leafletdescriptions.asp#lationship>

Fr. Bob's thoughts on this in his article "Charisms and Community Building" in the Oct./Nov./Dec. 2007 issue of *Pentecost Today*² and in *Catholic Charismatic Renewal Resources*,³ which also has a great many other wonderful materials for prayer group leaders.

If we want the "Fire of God" in our midst as the Jerusalem community had it, we need to work at growing our prayer groups into more than just a weekly two hour meeting. We need to ask God

² http://www.nsc-chariscenter.org/pdf/OND_07.pdf

³ <http://cccrsa.net/charismaticcenter/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Charismatic-PG-Resources.pdf>

5. Bible Study

The Importance of Building Community in Prayer Groups

by Maurice Blumberg

1. Listen:

Scriptures:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel. It is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: for Jew first, and then Greek. (Romans 1:16)

The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10)

A friend is a friend at all times, and a brother is born for the time of adversity. (Proverbs 17:17)

I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:34-35)

I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me. (John 17:20-21)

Where one alone may be overcome, two together can resist. A three-ply cord is not easily broken. (Ecclesiastes 4:12)

How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together as one! (Psalm 133:1)

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, then we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of his Son Jesus cleanses us from all sin." (1 John 1:7)

We must consider how to rouse one another to love and good works. We should not stay away from our assembly, as is the custom of some, but encourage one another, and this all the more as you see the day drawing near. (Hebrews 10:24-25)

All of us, gazing with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Take some time to meditate and reflect on the Scriptures above. What do you think God is trying to reveal to you through them?

2. Reflect:

No one can deny the excitement of hearing a great homily or teaching from someone who seems to know exactly how to bring out the meat of the Gospel and apply it directly to our lives. We leave the church or prayer meeting feeling filled, enthusiastic, and optimistic. Of course, the power is not just in the words spoken, but in the power of the Gospel (Romans 1:16) and the power of the cross of Christ (1 Corinthians 1:17-18). But what happens a week later when the words start to fade from memory? What happens when we face our mundane daily struggles and busyness?

Eloquent preaching and teaching is obviously better than dull exposition, and can inspire us, but what truly sustains us and deepens our faith in the long term is our faith community and the support of other brothers and sisters in Christ. Seeing them staying faithful to prayer, seeing them at church, seeing them in our small faith sharing group or at the prayer meeting, walking with them as they grapple with suffering, praying with them as we all struggle against temptation—this is what solidifies our convictions and helps us live them out (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10; Proverbs 17:17).

The reason why being part of a faith community of spirit-filled brothers and sisters is so powerful is that it follows the way God made us to live: not in isolation but in relationship (Psalm 133:1)! Through our faith community, we also learn the message of the cross as we see lives transformed by Jesus in the nitty-gritty events of the day. Jesus is the Word made flesh, and in a similar way, the Church is the teachings of Christ made flesh. It is us, his body, living out his word in our everyday lives. Remember that Jesus commanded us, before he went to the cross, to love one another as he has loved us (John 13:34) and he prayed that “they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us.” (John 17: 21).

Even though it may seem strange in our individualistic world, we truly do need each other if we want to grow in faith. We need the witness of other brothers and sisters in Christ. We need to see the way they live out his word. What’s more, they need the same thing from us! And most importantly, we need their prayers and support (Ecclesiastes 4:12).

If you really want to grow in your relationship with Jesus Christ, consider sharing your life with other brothers or sisters in small groups within your prayer group. Be counter-cultural and seek out this fellowship (1 John 1:7). Share your struggles and prayers and hopes with them. Be ready to “rouse one another to love and good works” (Hebrews 10:24). Join an existing faith-sharing group or Bible Study in your prayer group. If there are no such groups, consider forming one -- and begin building close relationships with each member of the group.

As you stand shoulder to shoulder with your brothers and sisters in Christ, the message of the cross will penetrate deeper than you’ve ever known before and you will be “transformed into the same image from glory to glory” (2 Corinthians 3:18). Then you and your prayer group will become a greater witness to this darkened and broken world.

“Lord Jesus, help me break down barriers within me so that I can live in fellowship with my brothers and sisters in my prayer group. Open my eyes to see my need for their support and prayers, and their need for my support and prayers – so that we may grow together as brothers and sisters in Christ.”

[Many thanks to [The Word Among Us](http://www.wau.org) (www.wau.org) for allowing me to use some material from their monthly devotional magazine. Used with permission.]

3. Discuss:

1. As described in the article, have you ever listened to a homily or talk that inspired you when you first heard it, but within a short time its impact was gone? If so, why do you think that occurred?
2. What impact did the article, and the Scriptures referenced in the article, have on your understanding of the importance of supporting one another as brothers and sisters in Christ? Why do you think this support is necessary?
3. What has been your experience in developing strong relationships with your brothers and sisters in Christ? How has their support or prayers impacted your life?
4. If you are part of a small faith-sharing group or Bible study, how has this impacted your life?
5. If you are not part of a small group, are you willing to join one? Are you willing to start one? Why or why not?

4. Pray:

Take some time now to pray for a greater openness to sharing your faith, and your life, with other members of your prayer group. Use the prayer at the end of the “Reflect” section as the starting point.

6. How Small Groups Have Made a Difference in My Life

by Fr. John Gordon

I recall a conversation a while back in which a good friend and mentor in the Lord shared with me that she had made three, what she called, “life-changing” decisions: in the first place; the ‘decision’ to give her life to the Lord; secondly, to pray every day; and then, to be part of a small group. Each of these ‘decisions’ resonated within me as true. I, also, am eternally grateful to the Lord for these graces. I remember well the teaching that I received, both during the Life in the Spirit Seminar, and in subsequent talks at prayer meetings and growth seminars and conferences. It was not until I moved to New Jersey and was part of the People of Hope that the teaching and value of small groups came alive.

Up to this point, my life in the Lord had been marked by the trial and error of new and exuberant faith striving to be expressed in the events of daily life. I relied on what some of the people in the prayer group shared about their lives, and I tried to read the various witness stories that spoke of living life in the Spirit. But it was not until I was part of a small group of brothers in the Lord, where we met every week to share and serve each other in love, that I began to go beyond growing in the Lord, to becoming mature in the Lord.

As I searched the Scriptures, I was taught to see how the Lord called some of the disciples aside to be particularly close to him. These are the apostles. Among the apostles, He called three to share a particular closeness with him; Peter, James and John. These were with him both on the Mount of Transfiguration as well as the Garden of Gethsemane. So, it became clear, that the Lord works in us most powerfully when we are part of a small group of disciples. Thus, the value of the small group was also having a biblical foundation. At the same time, as I participated in a small group, I was experiencing the practical effects of this way of life.

I was sharing with the same group of men every week. In sharing joys and sorrows, fears and hopes, I was being loved and encouraged, and corrected, to live a more fervent life in the Lord. My desire and ability to respond to grace grew tremendously. Ever since, I have been part of a small group; whether as a single man, or in the seminary, or now as a priest, I have experienced the blessing of being part of a small group.

Another aspect of small groups that I have found particularly helpful is how they can be an environment in which one can grow in confidence. I have often commented how the prayer meeting is a school for the spiritual gifts [see *Pentecost Today: vol. 28, no 3 July/ August/September 2003*]. This is especially true when there is, in the prayer group, the opportunity to share and discover the charisms. My own experience bears this out. I first encountered the Charismatic Renewal at a small prayer group in my home parish. There I found others who were living the grace of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. As we met each week to pray I was able to see how the outpouring of gifts from the Holy Spirit is intended to be exercised everywhere, not just in the prayer meeting. As we grew and shared with each other, we discovered all the doors that the Lord was opening.

I am currently meeting with a group of priests that I have been part of for over twenty years. We meet each week to pray, to grow together and to share deeply about our lives. When we share in our small group, we open ourselves to the healing grace of God, calling us to be more faithful and zealous in his service.

A similar model can be used by any group of people who are committed to this way of growing in the Lord. To get something like this started, find a few others who would be open to this plan of small groups. Agree to meet together on a regular basis; once a week seems excellent, but that may be too much, especially as one is getting started. The most important element to keep this alive is the level of commitment from the people in the group to the meeting. If some come in and out, it makes it very difficult for the small group to grow. It takes a while to trust and share deeply with one another. Another important element to keep in mind is that this is for the long haul. If, for a while, the group misses some gatherings, or there seems to be a hurdle in developing the trust and confidence to grow together, be patient with one another. It is my experience, and has been born witness to by many others, that this process can help to change our lives.

Source: July/August/September 2008 PENTECOST *Today*

APPENDICES

A. Recommended Books/Booklet

**B. Small Group Bible Study on Sunday
Mass Readings**

Appendix A

Recommended Books/Booklet

1. **Strengthening Prayer Groups**
edited by Sr. Mary Anne Schaenzer, SSND

2. **Faith Sharing in Small Groups,
The Vision and the Tools**
by Sr. Nancy Kellar, S.C. & Sr. Justin Wirth, S.S.N,D.

Appendix B

Small Group Bible Studies

on

Sunday Mass Readings

Bible Study on Sunday Mass Readings

Sunday, November 9, 2014

Dedication of St. John Lateran Basilica

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

1st Reading: Ezekiel 47:1-2,8-9,12
Responsorial: Psalm 46:2-3,5-6,8-9
2nd Reading: 1 Corinthians 3:9-11,16-17
Gospel: John 2:13-22

The Importance of Supporting and Praying for Our Bishops

Zeal for your house will consume me. (John 2:17)

Imagine a church adorned with marble columns, bursting with colors, gold ceilings, marble floors, walls covered with New Testament scenes, a mosaic of Mary and the saints, and a seven-meter high statue of Jesus Christ. This is the Lateran Basilica in Rome.

This building isn't just visually stunning; it has a rich history as well. As the cathedral of the Diocese of Rome, it is considered the pope's church in his capacity as bishop of Rome. The emperor Constantine donated the land for it to Pope Melchiades around A.D. 311, and had a church built there for him. Until the construction of St. Peter's in the sixteenth century, the popes lived in a residence built on the site as well.

Over time, the Lateran Basilica has faced many hardships. It has been sacked, damaged by more than one fire, and nearly destroyed by an earthquake. But even in these challenges, this historic church, which is a symbol for bishops everywhere, can teach us. Like the Lateran, the universal Church is both stunningly beautiful and has faced many challenges. It has been persecuted, and some of its members and leaders have made mistakes that have inflicted grievous wounds on it. Many bishops have handled their responsibilities well; some have not.

None of this should surprise us. The Church is made up of imperfect people, and bishops are no exception. Like us, they face temptation, and so they need support. As our brothers in Christ, they need our prayers, our encouragement, and the witness of our lives.

Try something different today. Write a letter or e-mail to your bishop! Tell him you're praying for him. Rather than asking something of him, just encourage him, and lift him up to the Lord.

"Thank you, Father, for those you have called to be bishops. Bless them and protect them. Together with them, we all pray, 'Lead us not into temptation.'"

(Many thanks to *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org) for allowing us to use meditations from their monthly devotional magazine. Used with permission. *The Word Among Us* Mass Edition contains all the Mass readings and prayers, and a meditation for each of the daily and Sunday Masses.)

Sunday, November 9, 2014

Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

1. Today, in joy, we celebrate not just a building, but also our unity in the Church, the Body of Christ. In the first reading we hear of the life-giving water that flows from the temple of God into our parched lives. In the Church, the glorious gathering of God's people, we receive our source of life-giving water and regeneration in the Eucharist. What steps can you take to better receive the life-giving waters of the Eucharist?
2. The Responsorial Psalm invites us to "Come! behold the deeds of the Lord, the astounding things he has wrought on earth" (Psalm 46:9). How would you describe some of the things for which you are grateful to the Lord? How can you better express to others this gratitude in your life, and in the lives of your family and friends?
3. In the second reading, St. Paul asks this question: "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit dwells in you?" How would you answer this question? What about during the day with its many distractions? How aware are you that God Himself, and the power of the Holy Spirit, dwells in you and is available to you? What can you do to increase that awareness during the day?
4. In the Gospel, Jesus needed to take steps to cleanse the temple of those who would defile it. We also need to take steps to cleanse our own "temple" of the things and actions that would defile us. What are some actions and motives in your life that need to be purified? What steps can you take to cooperate with the Lord in purifying these areas?
5. Also in the Gospel, Jesus was asked for a "sign" that would validate his actions in the temple. Do you feel that you also must have external "signs" from God to validate Jesus' actions in your life? How can you strengthen your trust and faith in Jesus, so you can better accept his actions in your life, especially when he is asking you to do something hard and difficult?
6. The meditation reminds us of why our bishops need our support: "The Church is made up of imperfect people, and bishops are no exception. Like us, they face temptation, and so they need support. As our brothers in Christ, they need our prayers, our encouragement, and the witness of our lives." The meditation goes on to suggest writing or e-mailing your bishop to "Tell him you're praying for him." What are some concrete ways you can show your support for your bishop?
7. Take some time now to pray for your bishop, and all bishops, that they would be faithful to their service to the Lord and his Church. Use the prayer at the end of the meditation as the starting point.

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, a director of partner relations for **The Word Among Us Partners**, (<http://www.waupartners.org/>), a ministry of **The Word Among Us** (www.wau.org) to the Military, Prisoners, and women with crisis pregnancies or who have had abortions. Maurice was also the founding Executive Director of the **National Fellowship of Catholic Men** (<http://www.nfcmusa.org/>), for which he is currently a Trustee. He can be contacted at mblumberg@wau.org or mblumberg@aol.com].

Bible Study on Sunday Mass Readings

Sunday, November 16, 2014

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

1st Reading:	Proverbs 31:10-13
Responsorial:	Psalm 128:1-5
2nd Reading:	1 Thessalonians 5:1-6
Gospel:	Matthew 25:14-30

Creating a Home Life that is Pleasing to the Lord

When one finds a worthy wife, her value is far beyond pearls. (Proverbs 31:10)

In 1843, American author Nathaniel Hawthorne published a short story called “The Birthmark.” The story focuses on a beautiful woman, Georgiana, who has one flaw: a birthmark on her face. Her husband, Aylmer, is a scientist who wants Georgiana to be perfect. So he concocts a potion to remove the birthmark. Unsure but wanting to please her husband, Georgiana drinks the potion. The birthmark slowly fades, but as it does, so does Georgiana. In the end, she dies, leaving a flawless corpse.

How often do we act like Aylmer the scientist? How often do we nitpick at our spouses instead of praising them for all the ways they bring us joy, hold our families together, and support us in our lives of faith?

Today’s first reading describes the characteristics of an honorable wife. She brings her husband good, and she devotes herself untiringly to her family. She is diligent in running her household, she reaches out to the poor, she sacrifices much for her family, and most of all, she fears the Lord and follows his commands.

Scholars think that readings like this one were used as models to teach young Jewish women, like the Virgin Mary. It’s no wonder why! This description of an industrious, prayerful woman has much to teach us—men and women alike—about how to arrange our days. It depicts a home life that is wholesome and fruitful. It depicts a home where spouses honor each other and where children learn the values of faith, hard work, and mutual respect.

Of course, no home is as flawless as the home depicted in this reading. We are, after all, fallible human beings! But that doesn’t mean we cannot all aspire to this perfect ideal. Just remember Aylmer: be sure not to kill each other in the process!

“Holy Mary, Mother of God, help me to follow your example in everything I do.”

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Sunday, November 16, 2014

Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

1. The first reading describes the virtues of a “worthy wife.” How would you summarize them? Why do you think “her value is far beyond pearls”?
2. The last virtue of a “worthy wife” in the first reading is one who “fears the Lord.” The responsorial psalm picks up on this theme as well: “Blessed are those who fear the Lord.” What is the meaning of this virtue, and why is it so important in living our lives as Christians?
3. The second reading is the conclusion of St. Paul’s discussion of the Second Coming of Christ (see also 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). He tells us that we “are not in darkness” but “are children of the day and children of the light.” What do these words mean to you? When it comes to the Second Coming, St. Paul also tells us we need to “stay alert and sober.” What steps do you need to take to be more ready for the Second Coming of Christ?
4. In the Gospel parable, the servant who buried his master’s talent said he did it “out of fear.” In what way is the servant’s fear different than the fear of the Lord mentioned in the first reading and the responsorial psalm? Why do you think the servant was so harshly punished?
5. The Gospel parable also reminds us of the importance of using the talents God has given us to build his kingdom and glorify him. How important is it to you to hear the following words from the reading when you meet the Lord in Heaven? “Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come share your master’s joy.” What do you believe are some of the “small matters” in your life that require more faithfulness?
6. The meditation, which is on the first reading’s description of the characteristics of an honorable wife, also challenges us with this question: “How often do we nitpick at our spouses instead of praising them for all the ways they bring us joy, hold our families together, and support us in our lives of faith?” How would you answer this question? What actions can you take to make the nitpicking less and the praising more so that your home would be one “where spouses honor each other and where children learn the values of faith, hard work, and mutual respect”?

Take some time now to ask our Blessed Mother to pray for us to be more like her in our relationships within our families. Use the prayer at the end of the meditation as the starting point.