

Deepening & Promoting Small Christian Communities



Final Report and Action Plan

**National Joint Convocation
August 9-12, 2007
St. Paul, MN**

**Follow-Up Conference
November 27-29, 2007
Benedictine Center
Maplewood, MN**



Deepening and Promoting Small Christian Communities: *A Final Report and Action Plan*

What must we do to deepen and promote small Christian communities in our church and for our world in the years immediately ahead? This was the presenting question for the National Joint Convocation on Small Christian Communities at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, MN this past summer (August 9-12, 2007).

The convocation brought together some 275 persons from 25 states and 11 other countries from around the world (Australia, Brazil, Canada, Columbia, Holland, Kenya, Mexico, South Korea, Switzerland, Tanzania, Uganda) to engage in a four day process of practical theological reflection focused on the development of an action plan aimed at the deepening and promotion of small Christian communities.

This convocation was sponsored by the North American Forum for Small Christian Communities (diocesan personnel), the National Alliance of Parishes Restructuring into Communities (a parish-focused approach), Small Christian Community Connection, formerly Buena Vista (a grassroots network of small Christian community members), the Mexican-American Cultural Center and the Secretariat for Hispanic Affairs at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Coming together under the guiding image of Walking Together with Christ - *Caminando Juntos con Cristo*, participants experienced a thoroughly bi-lingual event. Simultaneous translation was available for the plenary presentations and a bi-lingual speaker was present at each table where both English and Spanish speakers were seated. Prayer services and Eucharist were bi-lingual, but also included the participation of representatives of all the countries that were present. The convocation's bi-lingual, indeed multi-cultural character, was acknowledged by many participants as a model of how to do things in the church in North America today.

An adapted version of the N.A.M.E. process provided the structure for the convocation: N - Name the experience of small Christian community, its opportunities and challenges; A - Analyze the situations of culture and church today in North America; M- Make connections with the great Catholic Tradition; E - Enact a process of identifying personal, communal action steps on the local, regional, national and international levels to deepen and promote small Christian communities in our church and for our world.

At each stage of the process the initial step involved participants first reflecting on and then speaking (in a twosome and then with their whole table) about their own experience. This was then followed by input from an invited pastoral specialist. The participants then resumed their table conversations on the theme of the particular step in the process under consideration.

Fr. Arthur Baranowski, a pioneer in small Christian community development in the U.S. church and a practicing pastor, spoke to the experience of small Christian community and the opportunities and challenges we face today in developing them. Brian Rusche, an elder in



the Presbyterian Church, executive director of the Joint Religious Legislative Coalition in Minnesota, reflected on the socio-cultural scene today. Sr. Katarina Schuth, O.S.F., a sociologist of religion and professor at the St. Paul Seminary School of Divinity addressed issues of church and parish life today. Fr. Ronald Rolheiser, O.M.I., president of the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio and well known spiritual writer and columnist reflected on the treasure of apostolic community as a resource for small Christian community development. Fr. José Marins, one of the principal resource persons for basic ecclesial community development in Latin America extended the reflection on making connections to the Tradition by addressing the call to mission in big church and small church.

The convocation culminated on Sunday morning with participants, personally and by table, identifying proposed action steps aimed at the deepening and promoting of small communities in our church and for our world. A general hearing of these proposed action steps was held in conjunction with the closing Eucharist.

Conference evaluations by the participants were consistently extraordinarily appreciative.

Planning for the convocation anticipated that the great wealth of material generated by the four step process would need to be refined by a smaller number of people at a post-convocation gathering. To accomplish this task, the sponsoring organizations each named four representatives to gather, along with the convocation planning committee, to organize the wide range of possible action steps proposed at the convocation into a more focused plan of action steps.

A three day follow up conference to develop this plan was held at the Benedictine Center in Maplewood, MN from November 27-29, 2007. The Hispanic/Latino participants included two representatives of the emerging national Hispanic/Latino network of small Christian community members. Two representatives of the international network that formed during the convocation were also invited.

The action plan developed at this conference is centered on three themes: 1.) networking, 2.) education and formation and 3.) promoting cultural and diversity sensitivity. Under each theme the plan proposes action steps on six levels: 1) the individual person, 2.) small Christian communities corporately, 3.) the parish, 4.) the diocese, 5.) nationally, 6.) internationally.

In addition to the development of the action plan, the participants at this follow up meeting also engaged in conversation about the future of collaboration between and among the convocation's sponsoring organizations. A plan to set up a task force was put in place to continue this conversation – with the particular focus to explore the possibility of establishing a single unified national organization.

In addition to the production of an action plan to promote and deepen small Christian communities in our church and for our world, there are two other fruits of the convocation that require acknowledgement: 1.) the move to establish a national Hispanic/Latino small Christian community network and 2.) the emergence of the international network for small Christian communities.



Heretofore, while small Christian communities (often known as basic ecclesial communities in the Latin American context) are thematic among Hispanic/Latino Catholics in the United States, there has been no national level organizational effort to link and support them beyond their general promotion by the former Secretariat for Hispanic Affairs at the United States Catholic Conference. The incipient organizational effort that emerged at the convocation represents the first grass roots effort to move toward a national collaborative effort.

Given the presence of participants from 11 other countries throughout the world, there also emerged a desire for continuing networking with each other and with efforts here in the United States. A very concrete follow up was immediately pursued. Following the 2002 National Joint Convocation on Small Christian Communities in San Antonio, a collaborative website was established with the address www.smallchristiancommunities.org. Unfortunately, beyond that initial effort of bringing together information about and links to the various organizations and venues with an interest in small Christian communities, there was no extended follow up. On the initiative of Fr. Joseph Healey, M.M., a member of the international network that emerged at the convocation, that website, now under new management, has been re-configured as Small Christian Communities: Global Collaborative Website. It is now organized by continent and is beginning to offer a range of very interesting materials from various parts of the world.

The final project of the convocation will be the production of DVD resource. Gleaned from the several hours of convocation video, this resource will offer the major presentations at the convocation in the process context in which the convocation unfolded. The intent of this production is to offer small Christian communities on the parish and diocesan levels the opportunity to replicate something of the convocation process on the local level. The DVD will be available early in 2008.

Finally, special acknowledgement must be made of the support the convocation received from a number of sources. While some wish to remain anonymous, we gratefully acknowledge: The Sisters of Mercy of St. Louis, The Catholic Extension Society, The Marianist Sharing Fund, Good Ground Press, North American Forum on the Catechumenate, Orbis Press, Oregon Catholic Press, Sadlier Publishing Company and USCCB Publishing. The combined generosity of these donors played a major role in enabling us to produce this 2007 convocation.

Robert K. Moriarty, S.M.

On behalf of the convocation planning committee: Marci Blum, O.S.F (North American Forum for Small Christian Communities), Ronaldo Cruz (Secretariat for Hispanic Affairs, USCCB), Peter Eichten (Small Christian Community Connection, formerly Buena Vista), Alejandro Siller (Mexican American Cultural Center), Estela Villagrán Manancero (Home Mission Coordinator - Hispanic/Latino Ministry) Archdiocese of St. Paul-Minneapolis), Robert Moriarty, S.M. (Chair; Pastoral Department for Small Christian Communities, Archdiocese of Hartford), Dede Swinehart (National Alliance of Parishes Restructuring into Communities)



Follow-Up Conference Participants



Pictured above are the 22 conference participants representing the five convocation sponsoring organizations, along with the members of the convocation planning committee.

Representing the North American Forum for Small Christian Communities: Louise Alf, O.S.F., Diane Kledzik

Representing the National Alliance of Parishes Restructuring into Communities: Fr. Arthur Baranowski, Fr. Clement Davis, Margo Dotten

Representing Small Christian Community Connection: Mary Ann Jeselson, Meri McCoy-Thompson, Amy Sluss, Steven Valenzuela.

Hispanic/Latino Community: Louise Ann Pinette de Siller (MACC), Enrique de la Cruz, Belza Ramos-Long, Narciza Peña.

Members of the Joint Convocation Planning Committee: Marci Blum, OS.F. (NAFSCC), Ronaldo Cruz (USCCB-SHA), Peter Eichten (SCCC), Alejandro Siller-Gonzalez (MACC), Estela Villagrán Manancero (Archdiocese of St. Paul-Minneapolis), Robert Moriarty, S.M. (Chair), Dede Swinehart (NAPRC).

Special Invitees: Caroline Adam (SCC: Global Collaborative Website), Fr. Xavier Thelahhatt (International Network).



Introduction to the Action Plan

What must we do to deepen and promote small Christian communities in our church and for our world? Such was the presenting question for the 2007 National Joint Convocation on Small Christian Communities. Herewith are suggestions for action and grist for the mill for further critical reflection on the central question of the convocation.

The convocation planning committee presents this action plan to:

- The convocation's sponsoring organizations
- The convocation participants
- Members of small Christian communities (individually and corporately)
- Parishes
- Diocesan offices
- Other collaborators on the national and international scenes.

In many respects, the action plan is a work still very much in progress. At the same time, it represents the most developed effort to date to identify a range of possible action steps that might be taken at multiple levels in response to the three principal themes of concern identified by the convocation participants: Networking, Education and Formation and Promoting Cultural and Diversity Sensitivity

We invite readers not only to review this action plan from top to bottom, but also to read it horizontally. In other words, in addition to reading the all of the suggestions for a given theme, also read the plan across the themes in terms of all of the action steps suggested to individuals, small Christian communities, parishes, etc.

We have our work cut out for us. Clearly, the greatest fruit will come from concerted, collaborative action between us and among us across each of the six levels the plan addresses. May God who has begun this good work among us bring it to fruition.



Networking

Action Steps for Individuals

- Start a Small Christian Community
- Join a Small Christian Community
- Invite others to join your Small Christian Community.
- Encourage young adults to join a Small Christian Community
- Share experiences about your Small Christian Community.
- Seek opportunities to talk about Small Christian Communities and write columns or newsletters
- Go to Small Christian Community websites, e.g. www.smallchristiancommunities.org
- Go to diocesan and meetings and national convocations
- Evaluate your own SCC involvement. Go deeper.

Action Steps for Small Christian Communities

- Join other groups in the twinning experience here in the U.S. and around the world.
- Adopt prayer partners in another community.
- Have a joint meeting with another Small Christian Community
- Organize joint enrichment programs between small communities.
- Invite young adults to join.
- Invite family members to participate in Small Christian Community.
- Join national SCC organizations.
- Sponsor members to participate in diocesan and national meeting.
- Evaluate your SCC experiences together regularly.



Networking, *continued*

Action Steps on the Parish Level

- Encourage Small Christian Communities' participation in parish wide events.
- Encourage twinning and prayer partners, particularly cross-cultural twinning.
- Develop and nurture core teams.
- Collaborate between parish core teams.
- Gather Small Christian Communities for enrichment and celebration.
- Provide inter-parish/clusters enrichment.
- Create and display posters of Small Christian Community members sharing faith.
- Organize SCCs for young adults and families.
- Network with people working with families and young adults.
- Evaluate the overall development of SCC in the parish.

Action Steps on the Diocesan Level

- Gather SCCs for enrichment and celebration and offer resources.
- Provide leadership development at the diocesan and provincial level.
- Collaborate and connect with SCCs in neighboring diocese.
- Network with leadership of other ministries
- Network with people working with families and young adults.
- Promote separate young adult or family small communities in the diocese.
- Evaluate the overall development of SCCs in the diocese.



Networking, *continued*

Action Steps on the National Level

- Create a website that includes blogs, forums for discussion as well as links with other organizations. Website should include links to church documents on Small Christian Community.
- Create separate web space for young adults.
- Create separate web space for families.
- Organize a convocation every three years.
- Organize or co-sponsor annual regional convocations.
- Network with people working with young adults and families.
- Initiate conferencing using video technology and telephone.
- Develop a paid national staff to promote SCC networking.
- Write articles for national magazines, newspaper, websites, and newsletters that promote networking.
- Connect with appropriate offices at USCCB on behalf of SCC development.
- Liase with mutually supportive organizations (RENEW, NCCL, and NOAM and organizations for young adults).
- Explore structures for enhanced collaboration among SCC organizations.
- Evaluate the development of SCCs in the U.S.



Networking, *continued*

Action Steps on the International Level

- Promote the Global SCC website, with blogs and links to other SCC websites (www.smallchristiancommunities.org)
- Promote twinning between SCCs in different countries
- Explore organizing or attending international SCC meetings
- Initiate networking, linking with other international organizations (eg. Korea)
- Evaluate the development of SCC on a global basis.



Education and Formation

Action Steps for Individuals

- Prepare in advance for SCC meetings.
- Nurture your personal prayer life.
- Take the risk to share what's important to you.
- Experience cultural diversity.
- Pray for others in your group.
- Participate in sacraments and parish life and SCC events at all levels.
- Learn from SCC websites.
- Read books and church documents, SCC history, social justice, sacraments; pray the newspaper.
- Attend workshops.
- Frequently ask yourself: how am I, how does God want me to be, what steps will I take to get there?
- Attend leadership formation and share your leadership skills with others in your group.
- Study prayer, Scripture, church, liturgy, life skills, social justice, self understanding, spirituality.



Education and Formation, *continued*

Action Steps for Small Christian Communities

- Learn the dynamics of group formation and development.
- Join a national SCC organization.
- Attend a conference or workshop together once a year.
- Consciously connect Sunday Eucharist to SCC meeting.
- Respond to and hold in prayer parish life.
- Learn social analysis (look, discern, act).
- In prayer, include the experience of solitude and silence.
- Include family and friends in SCC life.
- Communicate SCC needs to parish staff and pastor.
- Discuss and use SCC skills at work, home, etc.
- Witness about SCCs - talk about your experience.
- Do outreach together at least once a year; reflect on the experience.
- Work on respect and confidentiality.
- Attend retreats together.
- Evaluate the status of your SCC annually.
- Do leadership training for all members of your community.
- Seek resources for faith-sharing.
- Pray together and for each other and for other SCCs.
- Share your knowledge and skills.
- Prepare for and live mission.
- Learn about church structure and your role in it.
- Pray for another SCC (twinning in prayer).



Education and Formation, *continued*

Action Steps on the Parish Level

- Establish and form core teams, including young adults.
- Provide ongoing formation for core teams.
- Share experience and hopes for SCCs with pastor and pastoral team.
- Have parish process where people are invited to join SCCs.
- Utilize the parish bulletin for faith-sharing questions and other SCC news.
- Promote SCCs at the end of retreats, RCIA processes, parish events, sacramental formation.
- Provide retreats and starter experiences.
- Do faith-sharing at every parish event.
- Celebrate SCCs with an annual gathering of all members; parish blessing for members of SCC, organize SCC Sunday, etc.
- Form ministerial communities (lectors, choir, etc.).
- Encourage an SCC staff position at parish level.
- Offer sacramental preparation in small community process.
- Offer starter experiences for SCCs, including ones geared to families and young adults, at seasonal events, after RCIA process and retreats, etc.
- Encourage expression of and participate in Catholic popular religiosity.
- Offer materials for youth, young adult, family and adult groups.



Education and Formation, *continued*

Action Steps on the Diocesan Level

- Maintain database/contact list of SCC leaders and parishes.
- Provide resources for SCCs , including ones geared to youth, young adults, families.
- Provide opportunities for diocesan staff to experience and learn about SCCs.
- Encourage formation of an SCC office in diocese.
- Organize and sponsor a diocesan formation day for SCCs.
- Collaborate with diocesan offices.
- Create an SCC link on diocesan website.
- Write articles for diocesan newspaper.
- Make regular reports to the Bishop.
- Host start-up experiences.
- Invite and encourage diocesan participation in SCC convocations.
- Establish diocesan SCC team.
- Offer workshops for parish SCC leadership.
- Pray for all SCCs in the diocese.
- Create a diocesan day of prayer for SCC.
- Organize a periodic gathering of SCC members.



Education and Formation, *continued*

Action Steps on the National Level

- Provide a forum to share resources and stories.
- Create and maintain a website for: resources, retreats, stages of SCC formation, models of SCC, list of resource people and their skills, FAQs, reprint of church documents that mention SCCs.
- Send representatives to international SCC gatherings, e.g. Bolivia.
- Establish and publicize National SCC Day.
- Petition for a yearly letter of support from USCCB.
- Collaborate with RENEW, Disciples in Ministry, etc.
- Provide training for diocesan leadership and others.
- Organize triennial convocation.
- Form national staff for SCC on-going formation.
- Develop multi-media resources (books, DVDs, etc.).



Promoting Cultural and Diversity Sensitivity

Action Steps for Individuals

- Invite people from diverse cultures to join your SCC.
- Invite people from diverse cultures to speak at your SCC.
- Learn to process the responses and reactions felt from diverse experiences and encounters.
- Learn and respect different ways communication, perception of leadership and ways of learning (use tools like Myers-Briggs, Enneagrams).
- Study Church documents on immigration and cultural diversity.
- Seek to have an immersion experience.
- Encourage individuals from diverse cultures for leadership roles and services.
- Participate in multicultural events and invite others.
- Seek relationships with persons different from self.
- Study documents on the Church on diversity.
- Join in solidarity with those in other countries relating to issues around social justice.
- Take risks and grow from "mistakes" (win-learn).
- Learn cross-cultural communication skills.
- Participate in diversity workshops to develop cultural sensitivity (e.g. MACC program: Heart of Multiculturalism (Mexican American Cultural Center, www.maccca.org).
- Listen to and read personal stories from other cultures
- Learn another language.



Promoting Cultural & Diversity Sensitivity, *cont.*

Action Steps for Small Christian Communities

- Open SCCs to all people (cultures, ethnic diversity, physically challenged, young adults, all generational groups, etc.).
- Seek to have an immersion experience together.
- Listen to and read personal stories from other cultures.
- Join in solidarity with those in other countries relating to issues around social justice.
- Learn and respect different ways communication, perception of leadership and ways of learning (use tools like Myers-Briggs, Enneagrams).
- Become aware of immigration and other multicultural concerns.
- Reflect on faith sharing materials that use the theological reflection method: observe, judge, act. (Social analysis in the light of the gospel teachings).
- Study documents on the Church on diversity.
- Take risks and grow from "mistakes" (win-learn).
- Learn cross-cultural communication skills.
- Evaluate action points periodically.
- Provide access and services to those with disabilities (ramps, Braille).
- Participate in diversity workshops to develop cultural sensitivity (e.g. MACC program: Heart of Multiculturalism (Mexican American Cultural Center, www.maccsa.org)).
- Learn another language.



Promoting Cultural & Diversity Sensitivity, *cont.*

Action Steps on the Parish Level

- Intentionally form culturally diverse communities.
- Learn another language.
- Listen to and read personal stories from other cultures.
- Participate in diversity workshops to develop cultural sensitivity (e.g. MACC program: Heart of Multiculturalism (Mexican American Cultural Center, www.maccsa.org).
- Learn cross-communication skills.
- Take risks and grow from "mistakes" (win-learn).
- Join in solidarity with those in other countries relating to issues around social justice.
- Enable people to join homogeneous groups (families, language, gender, age, culture preference).
- Study documents on the Church on diversity.
- Seek to have an immersion experience together.
- Provide access and services to those with disabilities (ramps, Braille).
- Invite diverse communities for different events.
- Offer diverse languages when needed.
- Develop diverse decision-making groups (e.g. Core Group).
- Provide materials and start-up experiences for diverse population.
- Provide culturally sensitive training for leadership.
- Encourage parish and group twinning.
- Provide enrichment resources.
- Provide speakers on diverse issues.
- Sponsor multicultural fairs and celebrations.
- Evaluate action points periodically.



Promoting Cultural & Diversity Sensitivity, *cont.*

Action Steps on the Diocesan Level

- Provide materials and start-up experiences for diverse population.
- Provide culturally sensitive training for leadership.
- Encourage parish and group twinning.
- Provide diverse enrichment resources.
- Encourage immersion experiences.
- Sponsor seasonal storytelling workshops from various cultures.
- Sponsor multicultural fairs and celebrations.
- Develop diverse decision-making groups (e.g. Diocesan Group).
- Work collaboratively with other diocesan offices that service diverse populations, e.g. disabilities, HIV awareness.
- Offer SCCs in diverse languages when needed.
- Study documents on the Church on diversity.
- Join in solidarity with those in other countries relating to issues around social justice.
- Take risks and grow from "mistakes" (win-learn).
- Learn cross-cultural communication skills.
- Participate in diversity workshops to develop cultural sensitivity (e.g. MACC program: Heart of Multiculturalism (Mexican American Cultural Center, www.maccsa.org).
- Listen to and read personal stories from other cultures.
- Provide access and services to those with disabilities (ramps, Braille).
- Learn another language.
- Evaluate action points periodically.



Promoting Cultural & Diversity Sensitivity, *cont.*

Action Steps on the National Level

- Conduct national convocations with attention to cultural & diversity sensitivity.
- Encourage immersion experiences.
- Provide diverse enrichment resources.
- Promote SCCs in diverse languages when needed.
- Join in solidarity with those in other countries relating to issues around social justice.
- Study documents on the Church on diversity.
- Sponsor multicultural fairs and celebrations.
- Develop forum for discussion and ask questions on cultural diversity and implication for SCC, done thru website, workshops, etc.
- Collaboration with USCCB with addressing social justice issues, e.g. immigration, human trafficking.
- Encourage parish and group twinning.
- Take risks and grow from "mistakes" (win-learn).
- Learn cross-cultural communication skills.
- Listen to and read personal stories from other cultures.
- Participate in diversity workshops to develop cultural sensitivity (e.g. MACC program: Heart of Multiculturalism (Mexican American Cultural Center, www.maccca.org))
- Promote learning another language.
- Provide access and services to those with disabilities (ramps, Braille).
- Evaluate action points periodically.



Promoting Cultural & Diversity Sensitivity, *cont.*

Action Steps on the International Level

- Utilize website for training, share stories, provide resources.
- Listen to and read personal stories from other cultures.
- Invite diverse communities for multicultural events.
- Provide diverse resources.
- Learn cross-cultural communication skills.
- Take risks and grow from "mistakes" (win-learn).
- Join in solidarity with those in other countries relating to issues around social justice.
- Study documents on the Church on diversity.
- Promote SCCs in diverse languages when needed.
- Sponsor multicultural fairs and celebrations.
- Provide access and services to those with disabilities (ramps, Braille).
- Participate in diversity workshops to develop cultural sensitivity (e.g. MACC program: Heart of Multiculturalism (Mexican American Cultural Center, www.maccca.org).
- Promote the learning of another language.
- Evaluate action points periodically.

2007 Joint Convocation sponsoring organizations:

North American Forum on Small Christian Communities (NAFSCC): www.nafsc.com

National Alliance of Parishes Restructuring Into Communities (NAPRC):
(937)256-3600, www.naprc.faithweb.com

Small Christian Community Connection (formerly BuenaVista):
(303)477-0180, www.buenavista.org

Mexican American Cultural Center (MACC): (210) 732-2156, www.maccca.org

Secretariat for Hispanic Affairs/USCCB: (202) 541-3000, www.usccb.org