



# A Steward's Way

ADVENT SMALL GROUP STUDY



DIOCESE OF  
Jefferson City



“The parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community. While certainly not the only institution which evangelizes, if the parish proves capable of self-renewal and constant adaptivity, it continues to be “the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters.”

“This presumes that it really is in contact with the homes and the lives of its people, and does not become a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed group made up of a chosen few. The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God’s word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration.

“In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers. It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a center of constant missionary outreach.

“We must admit, though, that the call to review and renew our parishes has not yet sufficed to bring them nearer to people, to make them environments of living communion and participation, and to make them completely mission-oriented.”

*EVANGELII GAUDIUM*  
THE JOY OF THE GOSPEL  
NO. 28



## BETTER TOGETHER

Any renewal in the Catholic Church must begin with the parish. As Pope Francis explains so eloquently in his encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel), the parish is where people experience God and his people. The Diocese of Jefferson City, under the leadership of Bishop W. Shawn McKnight, is developing a pastoral plan which addresses the reality of our communities through the lens of our Catholic faith.

Our intent is, in response to God's generous blessings, that we, the clergy and laity of the Diocese of Jefferson City, will embrace our responsibility to witness the Gospel, increasing our parishes' presence as centers of charity and mercy.

In brief, we understand we have three foci:

- Creating a culture of co-responsibility between the clergy and laity, in accord with the Second Vatican Council's teachings
- Raising awareness of the spirituality of stewardship as essential for all disciples
- Helping parishes increasing their capacity as centers of charity and mercy

Another way to explain the foci is with this illustration. With a culture of co-responsibility, we can grow in a spirituality of stewardship – so that our parishes can become even stronger centers of charity and mercy.



This Advent, the entire Diocese is being called to participate in a four-week series of reflection evenings, gathering in small groups. In Lent, these groups will be encouraged to meet again for a second, six-week series. This will provide all with a common spiritual formation in preparation for a diocesan pastoral plan.

We are better together. As one body, in Christ, may we grow together in faith, hope and charity through this work.



## WEEKLY PREPARATION BY THE LEADER

### CREATING A SPIRITUAL ATMOSPHERE

As a prayer focus for the gathering, arrange a Bible, a crucifix, and a light or candle on a small table covered with a cloth. Each week, participants are invited to add items to the prayer table, please be sure to ask for their items ahead of time and remind them to bring their items to each meeting.

### OPENING IN PRAYER

This prayer is prayed at the beginning of each small group:

*Mary, Virgin and Mother,  
you who, moved by the Holy Spirit,  
welcomed the word of life  
in the depths of your humble faith:  
as you gave yourself  
completely to the Eternal One,  
help us to say our own "yes"  
to the urgent call, as pressing as ever,  
to proclaim the good news of Jesus.  
Filled with Christ's presence,  
you brought joy to John the Baptist,  
making him exult in the womb of his mother.  
Brimming over with joy,  
you sang of the great things done by God.  
Standing at the foot of the cross  
with unyielding faith,  
you received the joyful comfort  
of the resurrection,  
and joined the disciples in awaiting the Spirit  
so that the evangelizing Church might be born.  
Obtain for us now a new ardor  
born of the resurrection,  
that we may bring to all the Gospel of life  
which triumphs over death.*

*Give us a holy courage to seek new paths,  
that the gift of unfading beauty  
may reach every man and woman.  
Virgin of listening and contemplation,  
Mother of love,  
Bride of the eternal wedding feast,  
pray for the Church,  
whose pure icon you are,  
that she may never be closed in on herself  
or lose her passion for  
establishing God's kingdom.  
Star of the new evangelization,  
help us to bear  
radiant witness to communion,  
service, ardent and generous faith,  
justice and love of the poor,  
that the joy of the Gospel  
may reach to the ends of the earth,  
illuminating even the fringes of our world.  
Mother of the living Gospel,  
wellspring of happiness for God's little ones,  
pray for us.  
Amen. Alleluia!*



## **SESSION ONE: FAMILY AND FRIENDS**

### **VERSE FOR THE WEEK:**

“Praise the Lord, for he is good; for his mercy endures forever”

PSALMS 136:1

### **PREPARING FOR THE WEEK:**

Ahead of your weekly gathering, invite your participants to bring pictures of their loved ones to the meeting. As participants arrive, ask them to place pictures of their loved ones to set on the prayer table.

[\*\*CLICK HERE FOR OPENING PRAYER\*\*](#)

### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:**

1. In what ways do you express gratitude to God for your family and friends?
2. How can I allow Jesus to use me as his instrument to help my family and friends come to know him?
3. At what three moments in my life did I most deeply feel happiness, not just the pleasure, of being alive? Was making a gift of myself to at least one other person a part of those experiences?



## **HYMN**

### COMPANIONS ON A JOURNEY

#### **REFRAIN**

We are companions on the journey,  
breaking bread and sharing life;  
and in the love we bear is the hope we share for  
we believe in the love of our God,  
we believe in the love of our God.

No longer strangers to each other,  
no longer strangers in God's house;  
we are fed and we are nourished  
by the strength of those who care,  
by the strength of those who care.

#### **(REFRAIN)**

We have been gifted with each other,  
and we are called by the Word of the Lord:  
to act with justice, to love tenderly, and  
to walk humbly with our God,  
to walk humbly with our God.

#### **(REFRAIN)**

We will seek and we shall find;  
we will knock and the door shall be opened;  
we will ask and it shall be given,  
for we believe in the love of our God,  
we believe in the love of our God.

#### **(REFRAIN)**

We are made for the glory of our God,  
for service in the name of Jesus;  
to walk side by side with hope in our hearts,  
for we believe in the love of our God,  
we believe in the love of our God.



## SCRIPTURE READING

### LEADER INVITES A PARTICIPANT TO PROCLAIM THE WORD OF GOD

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN 4:7-42

A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.”

His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.

The Samaritan woman said to him, “How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?” (For Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans.)

Jesus answered and said to her, “If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.”

[The woman] said to him, “Sir, you do not even have a bucket and the well is deep; where then can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us this well and drank from it himself with his children and his flocks?”

Jesus answered and said to her, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again; but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I may not be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.”

Jesus said to her, “Go call your husband and come back.”

The woman answered and said to him, “I do not have a husband.” Jesus answered her, “You are right in saying, ‘I do not have a husband.’

For you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true.” The woman said to him, “Sir, I can see that you are a prophet.

Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain; but you people say that the place to worship is in Jerusalem.”

Jesus said to her, “Believe me, woman, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.

You people worship what you do not understand; we worship what we understand, because salvation is from the Jews.

But the hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth;\* and indeed the Father seeks such people to worship him.



God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth.”

The woman said to him, “I know that the Messiah is coming, the one called the Anointed; when he comes, he will tell us everything.”

Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking with you.”

At that moment his disciples returned, and were amazed that he was talking with a woman, but still no one said, “What are you looking for?” or “Why are you talking with her?” The woman left her water jar and went into the town and said to the people, “Come see a man who told me everything I have done. Could he possibly be the Messiah?” They went out of the town and came to him.

Meanwhile, the disciples urged him, “Rabbi, eat.” But he said to them, “I have food to eat of which you do not know.” So the disciples said to one another, “Could someone have brought him something to eat?”

Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to finish his work. Do you not say, ‘In four months the harvest will be here’? I tell you, look up and see the fields ripe for the harvest.

The reaper is already receiving his payment and gathering crops for eternal life, so that the sower and reaper can rejoice together

For here the saying is verified that ‘One sows and another reaps.’

I sent you to reap what you have not worked for; others have done the work, and you are sharing the fruits of their work.”

Many of the Samaritans of that town began to believe in him because of the word of the woman who testified, “He told me everything I have done.”

When the Samaritans came to him, they invited him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days.

Many more began to believe in him because of his word, and they said to the woman, “We no longer believe because of your word; for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the savior of the world.”

**READER: THE GOSPEL OF THE LORD**

**RESPONSE: PRAISE BE TO YOU, LORD JESUS CHRIST**



## EXCERPT FROM THE JOY OF THE GOSPEL

### NO. 49

Let us go forth, then, let us go forth to offer everyone the life of Jesus Christ. Here I repeat for the entire Church what I have often said to the priests and laity of Buenos Aires: I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security.

I do not want a Church concerned with being at the center and then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures. If something should rightly disturb us and trouble our consciences, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are living without the strength, light and consolations born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, without meaning and a goal in life.

More than by fear of going astray, my hope is that we will be moved by the fear of remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security, within rules which make us harsh judges, within habits which make us feel safe, while at our door people are starving and Jesus does not tire of saying to us:

“Give them something to eat” (Mk 6:37)



### FOR DISCUSSION

- When or in what way have you been a credible witness of God’s love?
- Share a time when the word or message of God changed your heart.
- When the right moment arises in our relationship with others, we are called to speak about how faith fills our lives with meaning. Give an example of a time when you did this in the past, or a time when you could have but failed to do so.

### OPPORTUNITIES THIS WEEK

- At the end of each day jot down three ways for which you are grateful. Be specific. (ex: people, places, events, experience)
- Reach out to a family member or friend who needs your encouragement or support and share the message of Christ love.



## **PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS**

**LEADER:**

Thank you, God, for opening our eyes and ears  
to see and hear the goodness which surrounds us.

Response:

Make our hearts ever grateful.

**LEADER:**

Thank you, God, for the wonder of children  
and their spirit of innocence and enthusiasm for life.

Response:

Make our hearts ever grateful.

**LEADER:**

Thank you, God, for the love of our elderly  
who teach us humility and show us wisdom.

Response:

Make our hearts ever grateful.

**LEADER:**

Thank you, God, for the treasure  
of family and friends who share in our joys and sorrows.

Response:

Make our hearts ever grateful.

**LEADER:**

Help me, Lord, to be a witness of your love.

**ALL:**

We ask all of these things in your name, Jesus Christ. Amen.



## GROUP LEARNING AND FAITH SHARING AGREEMENT

Many Catholics meet regularly in their parishes. These groups are known by a variety of names and come under various lay and ecclesial organizations: small Christian communities, Cursillo, Knights of Columbus, ladies' groups, men's groups, RENEW, CHRHP, TEC, prayer groups, etc. Whatever the name, usually they share five attributes: the members engage in prayer, faith sharing, learning, support and faith-directed action.

The sessions in this booklet include these five attributes. To encourage a healthy and Spirit-filled activity, group members are encouraged to agree to abide by the following:

### WELCOMING

- An atmosphere of welcome and hospitality sets a tone. Make sure the setting is comfortable (including the chairs) and the group will not be interrupted by other activities or individuals.
- Encourage people to share something about themselves, if they do not know one another.
- Keep the social and refreshment aspects to a minimum.
- Start and end on time. Each session should take between 60 and 90 minutes.

### SHARING

- Commit to coming prepared and being present at all sessions, except for emergencies. The group is lessened when a member is missing.
- Understand this is a "safe place," for people to share matters of the heart and soul. Respect others' need for confidentiality.
- Share honestly.
- Listen to others without "correcting," judging or attempting to preach at them. Ask questions to help you understand better another person's beliefs, opinions or knowledge.
- Help to ensure everyone who wants to speak has an opportunity to do so by not interrupting others, and by allowing silence so those who are more hesitant may have the time to gather their thoughts.
- Help the group to stay on topic.
- Pray for one another and the Diocese between sessions.



## HOW TO USE THIS PROGRAM

- Ask people at the beginning of the session to serve as readers, prayer leaders and discussion leaders. These roles can be rotated each week.
- If the hymns are unfamiliar, you can find audio tracks of each on the Internet. If your group isn't comfortable singing alone, you can follow along with an audio file.
- Consider making assignments for the next week's readings at the conclusion of the session.

## CREDITS

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