

Small Christian Communities

Dear friends:

I welcome an invitation from Marie Cameron to tell about a rapidly growing ministry in the Church, commonly referred to as Small Christian Communities (SCCs). It is a pastoral ministry that has the potential to address and respond to some of the more urgent needs of our church, of our community, and of our country. But first a few words to explain the appeal of this popular ministry.

This appeal has been attributed in large part to a complex but important question people living in today's topsy-turvy world keep asking: Where is the hope? Where is the hope for the mounting numbers of marginalized in our midst? Where is the hope for the children whose basic support systems have been shattered by societal values and changing mores? Where is the hope for the elderly with diminishing prospects for adequate housing and nursing and daily care? Where is the hope for three fifths of the world's population who live in abject poverty and are deprived of basic human rights? And the list goes on.

As if in response to such discouraging and overwhelming 'hard data', a much-respected theologian, John Piper, believes that at the heart of Jesus' gospel message is an implicit aphorism, "Live now by the future you most earnestly desire to see." In other words, Piper is asking every one of us, "What future do **you** most earnestly desire to see?" He would argue that the prospects of **realizing** your desired future are enhanced considerably if you have had a chance to **envision** that future and engage in its unfolding.

Most people could spend a good bit of time answering this question: certainly citizens of Israel earnestly desiring security and peace, and of course, the people of Palestine as they continue their long quest for a homeland; parents wanting to see their children grow up healthy, happy and safe; the sick and infirm who long for healing and good health; those separated from their loved ones by distance and death who long to see their faces again, and so it goes. I myself have spent

considerable time on the same question and I encourage you, the women of the most powerful lay organization in the country, to do the same. So, if this question were put to you this very day, how would you answer: "What future do you most earnestly desire to see?"

As people of faith, we know this much for certain: without the presence and power of God's Spirit in our lives, we have little reason for hope, no matter the future. But, what if you had an opportunity to **experience** that same Spirit as you gathered informally with a few of your friends to engage in a prayerful and reflective dialogue on these very questions? This is the invitation I am extending to all members of the Catholic Women's League across Canada, an invitation to participate in a faith-sharing experience, initially for a few weeks to check out your feelings and disposition. And I do this with confidence that the majority of you participating will not be disappointed. Presently several thousand lay women and men, people of faith from across Canada, are gathering weekly to reflect on and share their life stories - their successes and failures, their highs and lows, their hopes and dreams - and they are finding the experience is commonly Spirit filled and life-giving. And remember, these people have little or no formal study of the Scriptures and represent people of all age levels and life experience, from 18 to 88.

But what do these people do when they come together? They gather in groups of eight to 10 in one of their homes at a convenient time. Then they engage in a process that is simply called 'faith sharing', a group process that is based on Jesus' own invitation and promise: "Where two or more are gathered in my

name, there I am in their midst." During the hour and a half gathering, the participants, using a format that is simple and non-threatening, engage in prayerful dialogue and reflection, trying to see connections between their own life stories and Sunday's gospel story. The format they follow as a general guide is called *Celebrating the Word*. I have been preparing this publication weekly for eight years and continue to be impressed with the positive and affirming feed-



Logo courtesy of Vic Balanon of St. Luke Parish, Calgary, AB.

back of participants using my six-page format as a basis for their weekly reflection and discussion. People commonly report that in this weekly gathering they experience their faith as being nurtured, their lives better managed and peace filled, and they report that they often experience a sense of the presence, power and peace of the Spirit in their lives. While they may not know what the future holds in store, they feel well armed to deal with whatever may come their way.

In the weeks and months ahead you will be hearing more

about this invitation. If you have any questions or comments I welcome your phone call or e-mail (toll free: 1-877-242-7935; fjruetz@celebratingtheword.com).

Should you have access to the Web, you will find us at www.celebratingtheword.com.

Blessings to you all!

Fr. Frank Ruetz, c.r., PhD, is Director, Resurrection Centre, Waterloo, ON.

Welcome the Stranger

“We lock our doors to keep the honest people out” - this expression has been used as a response to the question, “Why don’t you lock your doors?”

Our home and the locked door is symbolic of our country. There seems to be a false sense of security as if locking the front door of the country would keep out the undesirables, the terrorists, or the criminals. That is not to say that we do not need a process that could serve as a deterrent to those who pose a threat to our country and our citizenry.

Are Canadian immigration laws too tough or too lenient? Are our borders safe from those who want to cross over the threshold without permission; from those who choose to abuse our system? What about those who enter legally and then disappear and travel freely in our country? Finally, what about the endless number of refugees and immigrants who enter, become Canadian citizens, and add much to the Canadian mosaic?

Canada is a nation of immigrants. The number of immigrants expected to enter Canada in 2002 ranges from 210,000 to 235,000. The projection for newcomers in the year 2002:

- refugees - about 10%
- skilled workers, business people and provincial or territorial nominees, together with their families - about 60%
- family members of Canadian citizens and permanent residents - about 30%.

The long term goal of immigration is equivalent to 1% of the Canadian population. Immigration planning takes into account the following:

- protecting the health, safety and security of Canadians
- bringing in the immigrants Canada needs to grow and prosper
- reuniting families as quickly as possible
- providing a haven to those in need of protection.

The vast majority of newcomers contribute in a productive manner to Canadian society. I read in *The Teacher*, a publication of the Nova Scotia Teacher’s Union, of an elementary school class project. The teacher and her students made a blanket of red and white stitched squares covered with maple leaf and heart designs. “The hearts in the quilt represent our love for our country and others,” said one student. The blanket was given to a baby, a new Canadian, as a welcome gift. The teacher wanted the children to learn that they could make a difference in the life of a stranger.

We teach our children to accept others and that a sense of belonging is important. The notion of ‘acceptance’ is fostered in our families, churches, schools and communities. As League members, let us learn from children to enrich our country, and our own lives, by welcoming the stranger.

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