

Frequently Asked Questions about Saint Mark's Lenten Small Groups

What are small faith-sharing groups? Small faith-sharing groups, composed of 8-10 people, are parishioners who make a strong commitment to come together weekly at one another's homes or at the parish center to share their thoughts and experiences in response to the Scriptures, church documents or other written materials related to our Catholic faith.

Why is the parish sponsoring these small groups this Lent? The purpose is two-fold:

- a) To implement our parish strategic plan "to develop groups that engage parishioners in fellowship, faith, and fun."
- b) To link with our diocese to prepare for the Eucharistic Congress taking place at the BJCC on June 28-29, celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Diocese of Birmingham.

When will the groups begin? These groups will start before Ash Wednesday, and meet 6 times to finish before Holy Week. It is hoped that the meetings will take place between February 24 and April 14.

How long will the meetings last? Meetings will last from 1.5 to 2 hours, giving time for prayer, sharing, announcements, and fellowship.

Why have groups in parish neighborhoods? For many reasons, among them: to make it easier to connect with fellow parishioners who live nearby; to reach out and invite Catholics who may no longer come to church; to welcome new people into the parish by inviting them to the small group; to experience the warmth of a home environment in learning about our faith.

Can I join a group outside my neighborhood? Certainly! Even though we are focusing on neighborhood groups, we are also striving to make these groups **available on different days of the week and at different times**, so that you can choose a doable time for your personal schedule, even if the group you choose is not held in your neighborhood.

What will the written materials consist of? The groups will study Pope Francis' exhortation from 2013, *The Joy of the Gospel*, using a book format with discussion questions. The theme will be "Disciples on Mission: Called, Formed, Sent."

Why this theme? Bishop Baker has requested that during this 50th anniversary year each parish in the diocese offer their parishioners a deeper understanding of how we have been "called, formed, and sent" through the grace of our Baptism and Confirmation. He wants us to be more conscious of being missionary disciples. At Saint Mark, we are using the small faith-sharing groups to do what Bishop Baker asks: learning together how to better live our faith in daily life, and finding a deeper sense of mission and community in doing so.

Will the facilitators be trained to lead the groups? Facilitators and hosts will have trainings on February 18 or 19 that will provide the background and skills they need to create a positive experience.

What will be the benefits? The small groups have great potential for building stronger community within our parish, and they have proven value in deepening the spiritual growth of those who participate.

How do I sign up? By 1) using the sign-up sheets in back of church, 2) using the reverse side of this sheet and placing in offertory basket or 3) contacting Sister Madeline, 980-1810, ext. 3 or at stmarkpa@bellsouth.net. Check the parish website at www.stmarkrc.org to watch for group availability.