

## **Put Out into Deep Water: Growing the Gospel, Transforming the Parish**

### **Report on the 22-24 July, 2010 National Alliance for Parishes Restructuring Into Community (NAPRC) Annual Conference**

**By Caroline Adams, Xavier Thelakatt, and Belza Elia Ramos**

“Put Out into Deep Water: Growing the Gospel, Transforming the Parish” was the theme of this year’s conference that took place at Nativity Parish, Diocese of St. Petersburg, Brandon, Florida (USA) on 22-24 July, 2010. The premise developed was that by doing things differently and through Small Church Communities (SCCs) parish life can be transformed. We open ourselves to deeper conversion by growing the Gospel into our lives and become more Eucharistic. We have been called to “put out into deep water” and experience the life of the Lord even more.



Front L-R Fr. Xavier Thelakatt, Belza Ramos, Theresa Doyle, Caroline Adams, Rev. Bill Thaden; Back L-R: Fr. Krumm (NAPRC Director), Fr. Art Baranowski, Nancy Fischer, SSJ, Bro. Bob Moriarty.

The NAPRC Board, a local committee from Nativity Parish, the Diocese of St. Petersburg and several members of the North American Forum for Small Christian Communities (NAFSCC) Board planned, and hosted the conference. Daily prayer services, the Liturgy, Music and Audio Visual aides, room and table decorations, workshops and lectures followed the theme. Numerous volunteers and staff from Nativity Church fed, housed and entertained 110 conference participants from thirteen different states to make the three day conference an overall fantastic experience. The parish has a membership of 5800 families, is staffed by two full time priests and many staff members. There is also a school (pre-K to 8) with 750 students according to the pastor Fr Arthur Proulx.

**PRE-CONFERENCE WORKSHOP** on Thursday was led by Fr. Bill Thaden and Fr. Art Baranowski for Pastors and Parish staff. They modeled methods of creating a reflective opportunity with open ended questions. The theme was “Moments of Grace” and the questions elicited discussion and sharing for staff, pastors and volunteers on those moments or experiences where you felt that what you are doing for God in the parish was worthwhile and on what made it a good experience. Things like seeing the fruits of your labor in the community and seeing that the effects are cross-generational, creating connections, relationships, reverence and awe were positives mentioned. The opposite, bad experiences, were the result of encountering ignorance, arrogance, exclusivity, disillusionment and resistance to change. Art Baranowski posed the question “Can you design a parish that does not kill the Pastor and works by encouraging all the good experiences and discouraging the bad? How do you get Ordinary people to help each other connect the great faith of the Church with their ordinary lives? He related the story of “Matt” who after listening to a group discussion of “How do find Christ in your daily life?” said “I don’t know how to find Christ in my life, but after listening to you guys, I’m beginning to look.”

This happens by doing the things that a parish does differently: building into every activity an opportunity for reflection and faith sharing, from collection counters to the parish council. You can begin by letting people share their lives with each other: i.e. ask “What did you go through in the two hours before you got here.” Then people can begin to share about their faith. Open questions “Why are we doing \_\_\_\_\_?” “What is the most important thing about what we are doing?” “Who are we doing it for?” When people gather during the week for any type of ministry, committee, group, etc, have a three sentence paragraph about the conceptual meaning of the Sunday gospel for the group to discuss, and pray about. Help people see the benefit of what they are doing, or are considering doing, to the parish and to the faith of the parishioners. Help them explore the fullness of the meaning of the gospel. If you don’t give people a way of hearing the gospel, they don’t hear the gospel.

How does this take hold in a parish? The Pastor sets the direction, utilizes a core team (called Pastoral Facilitators or PFs in some parishes) to work with SCCs, ministries, prayer or devotional groups, committees, councils, staff and other groups. Selecting the right people with the right attributes and desire to be PFs is a first step. Provide an experience for those selected, where they meet Christ and find church through prayer, discernment and faith sharing. Utilize “Christ Renews His Parish” and other curriculum to train them and help them see the vision. Build them up to be community to each other. Meet with them once a week for six months, then once a month. Another way to get started is “Come as You Are” followed by “Pray Where You Are.”

The conference began in the Social Hall with registrations at 2.30 pm on Thursday, July 22. Dinner and Opening Prayer/Ritual, “The Heart of It All: Conversion/Transformation” led by Fr. Art Baranowski kicked off the event. The first day closed with a social. A continental breakfast before Morning Prayer started each day of the conference. Lunch was also provided. There was a morning talk and an afternoon talk with round table discussions Friday and Saturday. Saturday evening the participants joined the rest of the parish at the Liturgy, followed by a joint reception, where we mingled with the locals. An elegant banquet with multi-cultural entertainment by many parishioners was the climax of the conference.



Sitting: Sr. Honora Nolte, OP (RENEW INTL), Standing L-R  
Fr. Xavier Thelakkatt, Diane Kledzik (NAFSCC), Caroline Adams

**WORKSHOPS:** On Thursday nine workshops were offered simultaneously and on Friday there were eight workshops. The topics were:

#### **THURSDAY'S TOPICS:**

- **Pastors and Pastoral Staffs in a Restructured Parish: Fr. Art Baranowski, Pastor of St. Christopher's Parish, Marysville, Michigan.** A pastor is challenged to find time and energy to restructure the parish into Small Church Communities and to bring the whole pastoral staff into the same vision. A parish structured into SCCs can in fact lighten the load for the Pastor and Staff and give them renewed energy to be about the work they are called to.
- **Extending and Deepening the Prayer Experience of SCCs:** Theresa Doyle, St Christopher Parish, Marysville, MI (English) and Faith Formation Office, Nativity Parish (Spanish). Prayer is truly about living in awareness of God and in communion with God. This is what we as church are called to. Practical ways to help SCC members deepen prayer in their everyday life and when they come together.
- **Retreats and other Help for Nurturing SCCs in the Parish:** Nancy Fischer, SSJ, Director of Community Formation & Lay Ministry, Diocese of Erie, PA). Explored how the design of a group retreat and other activities unpack the gifts of the participants and invites them to deepen, renew and refresh themselves as the Body of Christ and as Members of SCCs.
- **Forming Good Questions:** Rev. William Thaden, Pastor of Sacred Heart Chapel (Lorain, OH). An effective reflection question helps us to connect our own story to the story of the Church. The workshop focused on developing the skills for critical evaluation of SCC resources and the development of effective questions to elicit sharing..
- **Máandalos a la Mission (Spanish Workshop):** Sylvia Caballero, Member of Nativity Parish: Christ invites us to be fishers of men and to throw our nets into deep water. In

this workshop SCCs were given ways to meet this challenge and assume the role of missionary disciples, with courage and enthusiasm and a sense of being called.

- **Evaluating SCCs-How Are They Doing?:** Practical methods and materials to use.
- **SCCs Global Website -- An Exciting Online Experience:** Caroline Adams, Belza Ramos and Xavier Thelakatt, An online, interactive experience promoting the SCC Global Collaborative Website ([smallchristiancommunities.org](http://smallchristiancommunities.org)), its purpose, and tips on navigating the website. Reviewed activities and stories posted from each of the six continents and the link to becoming a fan on Facebook. See more detailed report below.

## FRIDAY'S TOPICS:

- **Cultural Diversity:** Rev. William Thaden-Pastor of Sacred Heart Chapel. When cultures mix, lack of understanding of persons of a different culture usually leads to disconnection, uninformed judgments, and acceptance of stereotypes. Explored how to embrace the challenges of diversity in order to discover its gifts.
- **Pastoral Facilitators (PF): Formation, Recruitment, And Ongoing Formation:** Theresa Doyle. A SCC cannot exist without a good PF. What makes a good PF, How to recruit? How to sustain?
- **Troubleshooting in SCCs:** Bro. Bob Moriarty, Director of the Office of SCCs (Hartford, CT). Besides forming SCCs, every group needs to be making a faith and life connection by introducing a time for silence and reflection on a focus question in groups of three. Workshop described a process led by the Pastor and his Core Team to train heads of programs and groups to implement this, i.e. “doing everything differently” in every dimension of parish life.
- **Small Church Communities: So What: Moving Us to Mission:** Diane Kledzik – Assoc. Director of Evangelization and Adult Faith Formation, Diocese of St. Petersburg, NAFL. SCCs offered the perfect setting in which to transform ourselves and our world through Jesus Christ. Focused on how the Spirit can work through us in our members, and methods and materials to move us to mission.
- **SCCs Global Website- An Exciting Online Experience:** Same as Thursday.
- **Getting Started and Recruitment:** Fr. John Krumm, Pastor of St. Brigid and St. Augustine (Xenis and Jamestown, Ohio and Tanya Stagers-Assoc Director of Religious Education Archdiocese of Cincinnati. Getting started. What helps, what does not? Sharing stories from Diocesan and Parish level experiences that can help get small communities “off the ground” and root them in the fabric of Parish Life, nurturing them along the way.
- **Formando Buenas Preguntas (Spanish):** same as Thursday’s “Forming Good Questions”.
- **Diversidad Cultural (Spanish):** Same as Thursday’s Cultural Diversity.

## THURSDAY. JULY 22



Listening to Fr. Art Barnowski

**Welcome/Opening Speaker:** Fr. Art Baranowski, **The Heart of It All: Conversion/Transformation.** The whole reason the Church exists is the Eucharist in the Mass, nothing else. Having people spend time with the Gospel, discuss it with other people, will enable them to meet Christ. That is the purpose of the Gospel. In the Parable of the Sower the problem is not with the Word – it's with the soil. What keeps Catholics from being converted today? Parishes believe they have to have a lot of activities for the parishioners and offer too much. Young couples with children will not join SCCs, they are too busy. The Church exists to meet Christ. SCCs are a great structure to help people truly hear the Gospel with Christ with 8-10 people is a different experience than just hearing at Mass. There will not be any conversion if you only hear the Gospel at Mass. An SCC can become the main way to meet Christ and be prepared to receive Him in the Eucharist. Some SCCs take the Chalice home, one with 37 members feed the homeless, pray, study the Bible, are Eucharistic Ministers.

## FRIDAY, JULY 23

**The Challenges of Being Parish Today:** Fr. Bill Thaden. Ref: CCC Gather by Christ, Form God's Word, Be Nourished by the Body of Christ. Parishes are not working, they are killing their priests, there are no conversions by attending Mass once a week There is the challenge of diversity (Lorain, OH) has many small parishes, each with distinct nationalities, customs and even languages Slovenian, Polish, German culture, varying degrees of English language proficiency, and their own Catholic traditions. The American culture is hard on parishes, research shows that we sleep 1 ½ hours less than a century ago. We must strive to recover community- true Christian community of "One Body- As I am in you, and you are in me." Change the culture of the Church according to the Gospel. Our faith is already relevant; we need to connect it to our daily life. Moving from "doing to being".



Caroline Adams, Fr. Xavier Thelakkatt, Carol Luke (Technical Rep )  
and Vicky Hawkins (Conference Coordinator), and Belza Ramos

**Put Out Into Deep Water: Part I “A New Kind of Parish-Doing Things Differently: Bro.**

Bob Moriarty, SM First: Be about Parish. Parishes have been seduced by needs- create a program to meet every need. Second, be enamored with relationship. Be more reflective, more relational, in touch with how God is present in our lives. In restructuring, start with what you are already doing, are and have. Two structures are effective: one is forming SCCs, two: whenever people gather always 1. Start with an invitation to silence, 2. Pose a question about their lives, 3. Allow time for sharing, and 4, Start and end with prayer.

**Examples: Catechists** have a meeting. The coordinator asks them to break up in threes and share “What did you go through in the past 1 ½ hour to get here?” Then reflect, hand them over to God in prayer. As they start to get in touch with their live, they then get in touch with God. Other Questions: Name one time that dealing with these kids was a good experience? What made it a good experience? Then: Name one time when it was a challenge? What made it a challenge?

**Choir:** Take the lyrics of the songs; ask “what does it say?” Reflect, share, pray.

**Parish game:** Besides winning and losing what has it meant to you to be together in these practices and games? Reflect, share, pray.

**Questions can be general:** What is family meal time like in your family?

**Ministry related:** Name a recent experience (related to what the group does), or “Name one time when what you do touched /transformed one person.”

**Lector Prep:** What motivates you to be a lector? Who are we serving by being lectors?

**Homecoming event planners:** Besides what people consume or buy to take home at this event, what would you like for people to take home with them?

**How to get started:** Pastor communicates that this is what he wants done and expects that each group will start doing this. Form core group to work with the coordinators/chair of each

group, give them starter questions, and follow up for accountability. How is it going? Any resistance? Acceptance? Feedback?

Can it be done at Mass? One pastor after the homily asked people to share in their pews with two or three people around them: What hopes and prayers does each person have for their family?"



Fr. Xavier Thelakkatt and other conference participants inside beautiful Nativity Church.

**Put Out Into Deep Water: Part II A New Kind of Parish Small Church Communities:**

Fr. Art Baranowski. Presented a structure where people can hear each other. Don't ask a theoretical question, but more about the person's life, make them feel their life matters. That helps connect ordinary life to faith. Everything in the parish is to get people to hear the gospel more meaningfully. SCCs: A Small Christian Community is any group, a Small Church Community is one that is part of the parish structure. They do pretty much the same things. Why are we church? to bring people into communion with God. Parish: everything we do is meant to come to Eucharist, more openly, more knowingly. The Pastor's role is to bring Eucharist to the people. SCCs role is to help people come hear the gospel. Pastors need to invest in more leaders for SCCs. Reviewed what happens in a SCC gathering: Gather, settle, pray to God to Reveal Himself to each, hear the Gospel twice: ask "Was there a word or phrase that strikes you, let the group read a copy in silence, discuss What attracts you in this Gospel, what causes resistance or challenge, Why?, Give a three sentence contextual commentary, (audience, historical setting, etc) Go deeper: What would Jesus be saying to His Community?, Do you think Catholics have heard this Gospel adequately, 20 minutes of dialog in groups of 2-3, then large group sharing. Closing Prayer: a response to God together, then a prayer over one another. Evaluation of SCC: How well is it preparing its members to hear the Gospel?

Table and Large group sharing. take it home, next steps.

SATURDAY, JULY 24



Constitutive Elements of Church and what happens when Christ is not at the center of what parishes do: Fr. Bill Thaden's presentation.

### Constitutive Elements of Church: Becoming Holy-Christ at the Center. Rev. Bill Thaden

**Kerygma-Martyria:** Proclaim-Sacrifice. Pour ourselves out into the Word. Formed by and proclaiming the Word.

- **Leitourgia:** Celebrating the Sacraments, prayer and worship, drawn to experiences of knowing Christ, Communion
- **Koimonia:** Forming communities and living gospel values
- **Diakonia:** Drawn to serve: executing the ministry of charity

Christ is at the center of these four elements. If Christ is not at the center than "Self" is. Our language: The Word: My favorite scripture psalm. The Sacraments: I got all my sacraments. Community: I love being together. Serving: I love helping others. It becomes about how we feel, what we like, not about how what we are doing is meeting Christ, transforming us and others. Communities disintegrate and disappear when Christ is not at the center.

### Board Panel: Q & A.

**Called to be Eucharistic People:** Fr. Art Baranowski and Theresa Doyle. Many Catholics come to the Eucharist as individuals. The Eucharist is about "us" together. What makes it a good mass? People coming together to worship "OUR" God. Pray as one voice. What does God see in Mass? He sees His people coming to be refilled with His Body. He sees Love. He sees us making a big mess but He loves us anyway. CCC 1396 The Eucharist makes the Church. SCC Evaluation: How well does our SCC help us to celebrate Eucharist with the whole Parish?



**Eucharist with Nativity Parish followed by Social Closing: Banquet and entertainment**

**GLOBAL COLLABORATIVE SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES WEBSITE ([smallchristiancommunities.org](http://smallchristiancommunities.org)) TEAM REPORT:**



L-R: Caroline Adams and Belza Ramos: happy with 100% participation on SCC Poll

Caroline Adams, Fr. Xavier Thelakatt, and Belza Ramos presented this workshop titled “SCCs Global Website – An Exciting Online Experience” Thursday and Friday. We arrived one day early to spend time together, review the PowerPoint presentation we had prepared via long distance communications and checkout the room and equipment we were to use.

We were able to get positive feed back from those who attended our workshop at the NAPRC Conference. Because of technical restrictions, we were unable to have online responses to our website SCC poll. However, we used a printed poll, which we handed out to each Participant and received a 100% response!! They are tabulated below:

**SCC Global Collaborative Website Poll responses: The best part of my Small Christian Community is...**

- ( 0) Follows Patron/Patroness Saint of our SCC.
- (28) Reminder of 1<sup>st</sup> Century House Churches.
- (40) Prays together for the needs of others.
- (19) Promotes reconciliation and peace building.
- (18) Neighborhood spirit.

( 4) People noted that they were not members of an SCC and were at the workshop seeking information.

### **Workshop: SCCs Global Website- An Exciting Online Experience.**



Front L-R: Fr. Robert Nogosek retired professor from Notre Dame University in Indiana, Tony Marsella from St. Mark's Parish in Wesley Chapel, Florida, Colleen Ford and Judy Miller from St. Justin Martyr Parish in Florida, and. Back L-R: Fr. Xavier Thelakkatt, Caroline Adams, Belza Ramos at SCCs Global Collaborative Website workshop

The Lord would send who He thought needed to be at our workshop. A total of 6 people attended our workshop. In our first session two people attended. They were DIANE KLEDZIK, Associate Director, Evangelization and Adult Faith Formation for the Diocese of St. Petersburg, Florida, and member of the North American Forum for SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES (NAFSCC), and Sister Sr. Honora Nolty, OP, Director of Pastoral Services for Renew International. They represent two of our Collaborators! In the second workshop, we had four people attend. They were: Fr. Robert Nogosek retired professor from Notre Dame University in Indiana, Colleen Ford and Judy Miller from St. Justin Martyr Parish in Florida, and Tony Marsella from St. Mark's Parish in Wesley Chapel, Florida.

We were booked at the same time as approximately 20 other workshops. With 110 participants we drew the expected number for each workshop. We had a lot of positive responses from those who attended in the feedback questionnaire we asked them to complete. Our team will take into consideration all the suggestions and make those changes we agree on. They can only make our website even better.

Meeting new people and renewing of friendships was the best part of that conference. The motifs of ocean and deep sea fishing were everywhere, at the stage, the tables and the handouts in keeping with the theme "Put out into Deep Waters". . A team of hard workers from the parish under the leadership of Vicki Hawkins made everything easy for the participants, especially those from outside. There were also some vendors with materials helpful for Small Christian Communities.

Friday evening our team went on the trip to the Tampa Aquarium followed by a dinner at the site just for the conference participants. It made that evening refreshing and relaxing. The Eucharistic celebration that Saturday at 4.30 pm along with the parishioners of Nativity and the social were indeed a great opportunity to mingle with the “locals” and for them to take pride in hosting a national event. The banquet was elegantly and professionally done although the cooks and servers were volunteer parishioners. The banquet concluded with a variety of music and dance from ethnic groups like Puerto Rico, Columbia, Peru, Mexico, Samoa, Philippines, etc. We enjoyed doing the “Conga line” to several of the numbers. It was an exciting conclusion to an inspiring conference.

### **Website Evaluations:**

At the end of our presentation, we asked those who attended our workshop to evaluate our website. The results were as follows:

#### **1. Rank from 1-5, with 1 being the feature you liked best, etc.**

(6 voted), “3” for Content

(5 voted), “3” for Functionality, 1 voted “4”

(6 voted), “3” for Navigational ease

(5 voted), “2” for Interactive, 1 voted “0” for Interactive (web, not to include face book)

(5 voted), “0” for visual design; colors, graphics, 1 Voted “2” for visual design, colors, graphics

#### **2. Have you visited our website before?**

##### **Purpose for visit:**

(5 stated), “They were unaware of our website, until today and want to see what the website was all about.” -

(1 stated), “I wanted to learn about it”

##### **Frequency:**

(5 stated), “they had not frequented our website.”

(1 stated), “I have only been on Facebook the last two months. She really liked the Facebook aspect of our website because it promotes interactivity.

##### **How did you find it?**

(5 stated) “Through this workshop.”

(1 stated), “I googled it and was impressed that it is the first one listed.

##### **Did it meet your expectations?**

(5 stated) “More or less”

(1 stated), “Yes, so glad to see it and loved the stories.

#### **3. Have you visited our Facebook Page?**

(5 stated), No, but will.

(1 stated), Yes, knowing that immediately they can post something on Facebook is exciting.

#### **4. How can we improve our website: Any suggestion is valuable! Use the back for additional space:** Comments to improve our website made by the attendees included:

**Visual Design:** The consensus was that the home page gives a first impression of a geography lesson rather than seeking information about SCCs because of the layout of the map. Recommendations were to make the map smaller and place faces of people instead. Some felt there should also be some type of movement. Similar to what you have on African Proverbs (globe movement), something simple, not complex or too much movement which can be distracting. Hues of blue would be more inviting, pick up from the globe logo. The colors on the screen were too dark, not inviting. They did not like the green tones. The green hue for the lettering was difficult to read. Needs to be in black, for easy reading.

**Functionality:** They felt over all that the functionality of the website, the mission and vision is according to what Pope Benedict is asking us to use the social media to promote the Gospel and spreading the word of God. It's right on target.

We left with the words given to us by the Most Reverend Robert N. Lynch, Bishop of St. Petersburg echoing in our hearts and minds: "Go forth from this conference with the desire to cast your nets far and wide, even though you will not always land a great catch or catch exactly what you expect. I pray that you will place your lives, your ministry and your service in the hands of the Lord Himself, relying on the Eucharist to nourish you on this journey."

We look forward to the next NAPRC Conference with great anticipation.

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