



New Wineskins: Forming Mission Based Community (MBC)

Sample Material

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New Wineskins

Overall Goals and Objectives

- 1. To explore mission based community by starting to experience community**
 - A. By sharing and reflecting on our lives and the Christian mission in light of Scripture, with help from the readings and videos, and guided by the Spirit
 - B. By communal prayer
 - C. By communal discernment
 - D. By individual prayer and reflection
 - E. By celebrating and enjoying one another

- 2. To discern individually and collectively whether to form (or continue) an MBC**
 - A. By gaining an understanding that community and mission are at the heart of discipleship
 - B. By getting a “feel” for a Christian mission based community from concrete examples
 - C. By identifying participants’ hopes and fears regarding mission based community
 - D. By identifying community needs, necessary personal skills, and typical issues
 - E. By identifying participants’ gifts and helpful experiences for mission based community

- For those who feel called to continue on with Sessions VII and VIII*

3. To begin the process of forming an MBC, acknowledging structures may evolve with experience
 - A. Explore mission as a community by engaging in a “mission experience”
 - B. Begin to identify leaders and leadership forms
 - C. Decide on a short-term plan for meeting frequency, format, and location
 - D. Draft a community covenant or begin the process
 - E. Agree on personal and collective commitments or begin the process
 - F. Agree on basic mission based community structures and responsibilities or begin the process
 - G. Discern and possibly decide on mission, or agree on timeline and process to do so

Introduction

Discerning Intentional Community

(This is also in the Participant Packet.)

At times we all feel the longing to “do more” with our lives, to “be more.” As Christians, we often experience such a longing as a desire to know and follow Jesus more closely - to listen to him more carefully, to become his disciples more fully, to respond to his call on our lives more boldly.

In the busyness and distractions of life, such longings may wax and wane, surfacing perhaps in times of transition, of happiness or disappointment, or when we mark life’s milestones. Yet if we pay attention, we become aware that God is patiently and persistently calling to us through these deep longings.

One longing many of us feel is the longing for Christian community - to be known and challenged at deeper levels or in different ways than we experience in our parish or family; to pray together and reflect on our lives in light of Scripture and our Catholic tradition; to struggle and rejoice at life’s ups and downs with other committed Christians. Many of us wish that we had a place to wonder together about the most important questions of our lives: Who is Jesus, and how are we to follow him?

Perhaps we also have a vague sense that, with the support of such a community, we could be emboldened to take greater risks of faith than we do at present.

We might even “make a difference” in this world, beyond what we do now.

Our rich Catholic, Christian tradition holds many examples throughout history of communities filled with people who felt exactly these same longings and acted boldly on them. This “cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1), including the marvelous inspiration of the many saints who have gone before us, certainly can move us to “do more” and “be more” as would-be followers of Jesus.

Yet while our Catholic, Christian history is full of examples of “religious” communities, there are few models of Christian community, beyond the family and the parish, that apply to laity. (This is the common understanding of “religious” and “lay.” Non-ordained “religious” are canonically “lay.”) From time to time, we may look around at our household clutter, cranky spouses, quarrelsome children, or the inevitable hassles of our work lives outside our homes and feel a “longing” for life at the monastery! But, deep down, in our more tranquil moments, we recognize that this is not a God-given longing as much as an understandable human desire to escape; we recognize that we still would choose our messy, full, complex lives over life in the monastery. This is where God has called *us*.

But yet, isn’t there some way we can share this complex, messy life, “in the world,” with others?

This longing for Christian community is a call from God. Those who feel it need to heed God's call, listen carefully, and explore it with others who feel the same longing. And they need to do so in the light of their current lives and realities, taking into account their families and the "messiness" of contemporary life, taking seriously who they are *now*. While the saints and the grand cloud of witnesses through the ages offer us much personal inspiration, as well as some "signs" of what Christian community looks like, their *models* of community life are probably not so helpful.

What is needed are "new wineskins" (Matthew 9:17) of Christian connection and communion.

This module is intended as an exploration of what these new wineskins of Christian community might look like. JustFaith Ministries calls them "mission based communities."

What is a Mission Based Community (MBC)?

A mission based community is a group of individuals who intentionally commit to one another; have a mission that is centered on the poor and vulnerable; pray frequently for the needs of the world and each other; and together engage in ongoing spiritual formation. JustFaith Ministries calls each of these qualities the "touchstones" of the mission based community.

Why this MBC module?

This module is intended to encourage the formation of mission based communities among graduates of JustFaith Ministries programs (and others whom they may invite to join them). It is also offered as a support for those mission based communities that have already been formed (perhaps a Moving Beyond JustFaith group), to help them deepen and broaden their life together in the areas of the four touchstones: commitment to intentional community; a mission focused on the poor; prayer and spiritual development; and ongoing formation.

How will this module work?

This module is essentially a discernment process in which participants will "test out" mission based community by experiencing different aspects of community. Participants will prayerfully and deliberately explore what mission based community might look like and whether they feel called to commit to an MBC (for a time, perhaps one year, specified by the group). Beseeching the Spirit for guidance, they will:

- Share and reflect on their lives and the Christian mission in light of Scripture;
- Thoughtfully engage various reading materials related to community and mission;
- Pray communally, and plan and lead group prayer (with a partner) at least once;
- Commit to daily personal prayer, reflection, and use of a journal as essential to the discernment process;
- Participate in two community potluck-and-video get-togethers.

What time commitment will this entail?

The *New Wineskins* module is designed so that participants can spend the first six sessions in a prayerful discernment process about Mission Based Communities (MBC). For those who discern that they want to form a mission based community, they will continue with Sessions VII and VIII.

The first reading assignment will be distributed to participants two weeks before the module begins, and the group will meet every other week. So with the pre-Session I reading assignment and the week off between each session, for those who are participating in just the first six sessions, the commitment is for thirteen weeks. Also, two community potluck-and-video get-togethers will be scheduled on a weekend evening between Sessions II and III and between Sessions V and VI.

For those who want to make the full commitment and begin the process of forming a mission based community, there are two additional sessions (VII and VIII), with a week off between these two sessions and a “mission experience” in between. For these participants, the commitment will be for seventeen weeks.

Each module session is approximately two and one half hours long.

A *sample* module schedule looks like this:

- Aug. 18: Receive Participant Packet; have reading assignments for Session I
- Sept. 1: Session I
- Sept. 15: Session II
Plus a potluck get-together in between Session II and III
- Sept. 29: Session III
- Oct 13: Session IV
- Oct. 27: Session V
Plus a potluck get-together in between Session V and VI
- Nov. 10 Session VI: *This is the last session for those who are not choosing to form a mission based community*
- Nov. 24: Session VII
- Dec. 8: Session VIII

What is expected of me?

Show up! Do your homework! Engage the conversation! And, open yourself to a prayerful discernment process, which is most essentially a listening process: listening to oneself, listening to God (individually and collectively), listening to one another, listening to the experience of other communities, listening to the pain and suffering of the world around us.

Through readings and Scripture reflection, this module offers possible theological and biblical foundations for mission based community, as well as, we hope, the most critical factor - inspiration. The module provides glimpses of real life “experiments” in Christian community (see end note* on next page) and identifies common issues and needs that communities face.

By design, the module does not provide a recipe or a map for the creation of a mission based community. The details will be worked out by the module participants themselves as the discernment process unfolds and afterwards. You are asked to begin this exploration trusting that God will enlighten and lead you, both collectively and individually, as God has guided others before you who have shared these longings for communion and service. As stated in Psalm 127, “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.”

In that spirit, commitment to daily personal prayer and reflection, a willingness to share one’s thoughts and feelings with the group, and personal engagement in communal prayer are essential to this discernment process.

(* These experiments include: those of the early Christian community; Sant’Egidio; the Catholic Worker; base communities in Sao Paulo and Switzerland; the family-oriented Emmanuel Community in Maryland; a parish in Colorado; a New Orleans “house church;” Koinonia Farm in Georgia; the worldwide community of L’Arche; Church of the Saviour and Samaritan Inns in Washington, DC; Pendle Hill in Philadelphia; the New Creation Community in Seattle; the Taize Community in France; the Sisters of Loretto; and Sojourners Community.)



SESSION I: Conversion

Schedule for this Session

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Minutes</i>
Welcome	5 minutes
Opening Prayer	5 minutes
Introductions	30 minutes
Business	30 minutes
Break	15 minutes
Discussion of Readings	30 minutes
Praying with Scripture Process	30 minutes
Closing Prayer	5 minutes
Total Time	150 minutes

Session I Outline and Notes

Welcome (5 minutes)

Warmly welcome people to the *New Wineskins* mission based community module. In your own words, briefly reiterate the essential points from the *Introduction*, emphasizing the discernment process at the module's core. Acknowledge that this process - which requires deep personal engagement - may be new territory and somewhat challenging to many. Lift up also the exciting nature of such an open-ended process as well as the opportunity to be inspired by other Christian communities and to learn from a number of deep thinkers who have written about community and mission.

Share a few things about the format and tasks for this session.

Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

In advance of session one, facilitator needs to set a small prayer table with the following items: a bible, a glass punch bowl, a glass of water and a candle.

Begin the prayer by inviting everyone to a moment of stillness as you turn on the music and light the candle.

Facilitator or a participant reads Matthew 9:16-17.

Facilitator then offers the following:

We call upon the Holy Spirit to stretch us. The old ways of being and doing are not the right containers. We are going to create a new spirit, a new container in us and around us.

Holding up the glass of water, continue with the following:

Each of us brings with us some life-giving water, a spirit, a piece of our self, our own story, water from our own life.

Pour the water from the glass into the punch bowl. Then ask each person to do the same one by one.

Close with the following:

In the beginning before there was us, the Spirit hovered over the waters. Then the waters of the great flood cleansed the world and through the waters of the Jordan our sins were forgiven. We ask you Spirit of God to bless these waters that have sustained us ... and that will refresh us for this journey into community.

Introductions Exercise

Business

Break

Discussion of Readings

Praying with Scripture Process

Closing Prayer

SESSION II: Conversion

SESSION III: Community

SESSION IV: Community

SESSION V: Community

SESSION VI: Call

SESSION VII: Commitment

SESSION VIII: Commitment