

PEC Presentation May 2021

Introduction – LIVE – 3 minutes (Ana & Hugo) Growth through Multiplication and the 7 purposes (aims) of the a cell group

Hello Everyone, My name is Hugo Carreno and this is my wife, Ana. We will be presenting the following segment: Growth through Multiplication and the 7 purposes or “aims” of the cell.

Ana and I have been parishioners of St. Edward Catholic Church in Pembroke Pines, FL for over 25 years. As some of you may know, the late Msgr. Michael Eivers, who had the vision to adopt and develop the parish evangelizing cells, was also the founding pastor of our parish back in 1994. We became very familiar with the cell groups and attended our first cell group meeting in 2007. We are now leaders of our spanish speaking cell group, Pescadores de hombres or “Fishers of men”.

When Don Pigi and Msgr. Eivers began their mission to enrich the cells, they were divinely inspired (through lots of prayer I’m sure) to emphasize the key purposes of a cell group. The final product was what is now known as the 7 purposes or “aims”. They are: (POWERPOINT)

Seven Purposes (Aims) of a Cell Group

1. To grow in ongoing intimacy with the Lord
2. To evangelize by word and lifestyle, especially by inviting people to join the group
3. To grow to a point of multiplication (birthing)
4. To give and receive support
5. To inspire members to prepare for leadership in the future
6. To be involved in parish ministry according to our gifts
7. To deepen our Catholic identity

Our objective is to briefly introduce you to each one of the 7 aims in a manner that is easily understood, in an effort to help you gain a deeper understanding of them. This objective is extremely important because at times we may fall into a regular routine of cell gatherings, adhering to the agenda, and fellowship. However often times we may overlook the core behind why we joined and/or currently lead a cell group in the first place; and what the actual intentions of our co-founders were when they were inspired to create this organism.

1. GROW IN ONGOING INTIMACY WITH THE LORD

The essence of being a Christian is to have God at the very center of our lives. In order to accomplish this we must establish a certain intimacy with Him. We must learn to communicate with Him and to form an intimate connection with Him. Equally as important, we must seek Holiness. We must have a sincere devotion and desire to be Holy. "For I, the Lord am your God. You shall make and keep yourselves holy, because I am holy." (Lv 11:44)

But what exactly does it mean to have intimacy with The Lord? Often times people may associate this term with going about practicing certain external or superficial activities that Christians normally do such as reading the Bible, going to mass, participating in ministry, etc. And although these activities are very much a part of living our Catholic faith and are necessary in our daily lives, if not used properly they won't necessarily help us grow in ongoing intimacy with The Lord.

"So you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God Through [Christ Jesus] the whole structure is held together and grows into a temple sacred in the Lord; in him you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (Ep 2:19-22).

This aim is directly linked with the call to holiness for all of us. Prior to becoming actively involved in a cell group, my wife and I were convinced we were good Catholics because we were focused only on all the externals such as going to mass regularly, completing our sacraments, making sure our kids' sacraments were in order, etc.. But little did we know that we were only meeting the minimum requirements (as Fr. Mike used to say...). We had no intimacy with The Lord. The cell group opened our eyes and we realized that our calling was much more than what we had imagined. It was then that we realized that we are called to be saints; that the only way to aspire to be a saint is to not only put him at the very center of our lives, but to put him above all else. We must commit ourselves personally and earnestly to a life lived in the Spirit. We must understand with clarity that the object of the cells is to help us become saints.

2. TO EVANGELIZE BY WORD AND LIFESTYLE; ASKING OTHERS TO JOIN THE CELL

At the very end of Matthew's gospel 28: 19-20, just before He ascends to heaven, Jesus says to his disciples: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

Otherwise known as The Great Commission, Jesus leaves us with this final instruction. His marching orders clearly command us to evangelize, not only by sharing with others about our faith, but by the way we live. Often times it is the latter that leaves the greater impression on our fellow friends, family and neighbors. Once you have experienced the love of Jesus, it is natural to want to share Him with others and they will see Jesus reflected in your life.

"In the same way your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Mt 5:16).

In today's secular world, it is becoming increasingly more difficult to invite others to a cell meeting. Many of us might shy away from doing so for fear of being ridiculed or cast aside. Others of us may feel our knowledge of the faith is inadequate, so we lack confidence when discussing our faith. We will talk a little more about this later on in the 7th aim.

The word evangelization may sometimes be misconstrued with taking a long journey, preaching in distant lands or knocking on doors. However, in most cases, evangelization occurs in our very own backyards. In our experience, the most effective form of evangelization, OIKOS, occurs within our very own community. We can evangelize to the clerk at a grocery store just as easily as we can evangelize to someone from our parish. We can also evangelize at our places of work and to our next door neighbors; and probably the easiest of all, to our family and friends. It all starts with prayer, we must ask The Lord to grant us the courage to "leave our mark" on all whom we make daily contact with and to be able to evangelize to them, to share His light and His love, whether by action or by word.

Learning to share Jesus helps us to keep Him alive in our hearts. It helps us to become spontaneous and true witnesses of our Faith. It helps to ensure that our behavior is in keeping with our words. Acknowledging the presence of Jesus in the lives of believers within the cell will become a significant feature in the mutual education of the members.

In 2008 Pope Benedict called for a "New Evangelization". The New Evangelization calls each of us to deepen our faith, believe in the Gospel message, and go forth to proclaim the Gospel. The focus of the New Evangelization calls all Catholics to be evangelized and then go forth to evangelize. In a special way, the New Evangelization is focused on 're-proposing' the Gospel to those who have experienced a crisis of faith. Pope Benedict XVI called for the re-proposing of the Gospel "to those regions awaiting the first evangelization and to those regions where the roots of Christianity are deep but who have experienced a serious crisis of faith due to secularization." The New Evangelization invites each Catholic to renew their relationship with Jesus Christ and his Church.

3. TO GROW TO A POINT OF MULTIPLICATION (BIRTHING A NEW CELL)

The Cell groups should have between 4 and 20 members. We refer to them as “cells” because just like the cells in the human body, the cell group multiplies when it reaches a certain capacity. The Mother group gives birth to two new groups which begins the process of a new life. Multiplication occurs when there is a regular attendance of 12 members. Multiplication is imperative, so that the groups can maintain themselves small enough to address the demand of the members. The smaller groups can reach the newer member with twice the effectiveness as that of the larger groups.

Birthing is another term used for the process of multiplication. This analogy of birthing is appropriate because the human birth process causes pain, separation, and in some cases sadness for what we have lost. But ever more important is the fact that this analogy also means cause for celebration, joy, and appreciation for a new life, for all He has given to us and for all we have received.

When Ana & I first joined a cell group, we were overjoyed by our new found source of knowledge and fellowship. We remember anxiously looking forward to the bi weekly teaching and meeting with our new parish friends. One night, during one of our regular cell meetings, the leaders made an announcement that the time had come for the cell group to birth and multiply into two separate groups. We were overcome with sadness and didn't quite understand why this had to happen. After all, everyone enjoyed each other's company and the fellowship was amazing. Nonetheless, we complied and several weeks later, we had a birthing ceremony in our parish. We quickly learned that just because certain members were no longer participating in our cell group didn't mean that we could not share each other's company, nor did it mean an end to our fellowship with them. We continued to meet outside of the cell group, during the holidays and at other church events. To this day we are still in very close contact with those members with whom our cell group parted ways with back then.

4. TO GIVE AND RECEIVE SUPPORT AND GROW IN MUTUAL LOVE

Each one of the seven aims of a cell group fills a very special and unique purpose. However, this aim, in my opinion, is among the most important being that it is the “glue” that holds the cell group together. Cell members often refer to each other as “family”. This is because together we grow in our love for Him. And as a result, we grow in our love for each other. It is from this mutual love that others will recognize the truth of who we are as Christians. "I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another." (John 13:34)

Part of this growth is to humbly support other cell members when they are in need. During our tenure as leaders of our cell group, we have experienced countless moments of joy, sadness, rejoicing, and grief. We all experience peaks and valleys in our lives and it is human nature to want to share these moments with folks you love and trust. We've laughed together, cried together and most importantly, prayed together. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep." (Rm 12:15)

On occasion, a member may arrive at a cell meeting with a very heavy burden on their shoulders. As leaders we must recognize that there will be times when focusing on the member and the challenges he or she may be facing will outweigh following the cell agenda. Although this should by no means be considered the norm, we must ask the Holy Spirit for guidance and make exceptions from time to time. This is what we are called to do as Christians.

It is also vital that we as cell leaders foster an environment that encourages members to share their burdens or their moments of joy outside the cell meetings. In today's world full of wonderful technology, we have access to emails and instant messaging at our fingertips. We encourage members to share good news, ask for prayers, or request any kind of help and support outside of the meetings as well. After all, we are one body in Christ. We are family.

I'd like to introduce two longtime members of our cell group who have asked to share a brief message with you: **LINCOLN/IRIS – LINCOLN** - Hello, my name is Lincoln and this is my wife, Iris. We have been a member of our cell group since 200?? A couple of years ago we experienced a tragic moment in our life and our son had to be rushed to the hospital. While on our way to the hospital, my wife sent a text message asking for prayers. We cannot express the overwhelming shower of love and support we received. **IRIS** - Some of our cell members visited the hospital and prayed with us. We never felt alone and we never lost hope because we knew we could rely on our cell “family” for anything. Thank The Lord our son was OK and eventually released from the hospital. Thank you and God Bless you.

We also strongly encourage all of the members at a meeting to share. Make time for everyone to be heard. You never know who could be carrying a heavy burden but might be afraid to speak out. Listen to one another, with patience and respect. And of course, pray for the needs of everyone in the group.

5. TO INSPIRE MEMBERS TO PREPARE FOR LEADERSHIP IN THE FUTURE (ON- THE-JOB TRAINING)

My old boss used to say: “Your team is only as good as your bench”. She was referring, of course, to a sports analogy which means how well a team performs when the “starters” or “leaders” are no longer in the game. In the management world, one must ensure that you always have one or more individuals on your team that you can hone. People that you know can one day do your job when you’re not around or no longer there. People that you know have the talent and the skills to one day be the next manager.

Well, the same concept applies to our cell groups. The leader must have a spiritual vision of the future lying ahead for cell members and they should help the members increase and enrich the gifts which God has given them. We must always be mindful of who in the cell group has the ability to step up and be the next leader. Spend some extra time with that person; help them understand that they have the wherewithal to be the next leader. Inspire them!

"And what you heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will have the ability to teach others as well."(2 Tm 2:2)

The cells were designed to grow and multiply. The good leader must keep in mind the following considerations: projects and work must always be related to growth and multiplication. **A leader must be patient and wait for future leaders to mature. Those members who show promise for future leadership must be identified and given responsibilities.** Cell groups provide the best on-the-job training. Jesus showed us the way to develop leaders. The first cell group was Jesus and his disciples. **Jesus chose twelve men. His work was to train these men to *think like he thought*, to *feel like he felt*, and to *act like he acted*, mirroring the greatest commandment: to love the Lord with all of your mind, your heart, and your soul. These men were Jesus’ primary focus; because they would pass his way of life and his teachings on to others. It was a natural way to raise leaders from within.**

6. CARRY OUT MINISTRY IN THE MYSTICAL BODY OF CHRIST, THE CHURCH. BEING ACTIVE IN MINISTRY ACCORDING TO OUR GIFTS.

Prior to our joining a cell, my wife and I did not serve in any ministry. Today we are proud to say we are much more involved in our parish. Not only are we cell leaders, but my wife serves as a Eucharistic Minister and together we served as coordinators of our "Ignite" youth group ministry for many years. You see, God created each and every one of us uniquely different. We have each been given a very special and unique set of gifts for a reason. Sometimes we don't know that we have these gifts and we have to ask that the Holy Spirit reveals them to us. Yes, we use these gifts to choose our spouses and to choose our careers, however it is equally important that we use them to choose our vocation within the church. The church offers a very wide array of lay ministries. These ministries not only help to maintain our church but they are also essential in growing our church. After all, it is our duty to lead by example and if others see the light of Christ in us, we can definitely inspire others to get involved.

"As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of the varied graces of God." (1 Peter 4:10)

The church is an organism, not an organization! The purpose of evangelization is not only to bring others to Jesus, but also to help to remain in communion with Him, and this comes about by becoming a part of the Church in a consistent, responsible and purposeful way. Learn to serve your brothers and sisters in the community, using the gifts which the Holy Spirit has given to each of you for the common good, with the purpose of edifying Christ's Mystical Body, that is the Church. St. Paul speaks about this in his first letter to the Corinthians chapter 12:4-6.

Nelson & Vilma – **NELSON** - Hello, my name is Nelson and this is my wife Vilma. We started to actively participate in the cell groups in?? The cell group opened the doors for us to discover that we are called to serve The Lord in many more ways than to just go to mass regularly. Vilma is a Eucharistic minister and I am a lector at Sunday mass. **VILMA**- We are also the coordinators of the Baptismal ministry at St. Edward Church. Our lives have been spiritually enriched by serving. It has been a blessing to our marriage and to our family. Although we serve out of love to The Lord, we feel that our service has set a great example to our children and we pray that one day they will follow in our footsteps. We also pray that our service can be an inspiration to other parish members to serve.

Our parish vision is: To be a place of real salvation for all who enter. I believe that the robust participation in the cell groups in our parish is a great blessing. If we truly desire our parish to be a place of salvation, the cell groups lay down a very solid foundation to carry out our vision and act as a source for service in the parish.

7. TO DEEPEN ONE'S CATHOLIC IDENTITY

DORIS/RAMON – DORIS – Hi, my name is Doris and this is my husband Ramon. We decided to join a cell group ??years ago. Ramon and I grew up catholic and we've enjoyed ??years of married life together. We have always wanted to grow spiritually so we always did our best to participate in church activities and ministries in order to grow closer to the Lord and to learn more about our faith. **RAMON** - When we joined the cell group, we paid very close attention to all the teachings and prayed that The Lord help us understand them and apply them in our daily life. **DORIS**- Words cannot express how much we have learned about our faith in our cell group. It has helped us share our faith with others and our marriage is stronger than ever because every day we pray together and we try to bring others closer to Him. Thank you and God Bless you.

In the letter to the Colossians (2:2-3), St. Paul prays for this community he has left behind that through his love and teachings “their hearts may be encouraged as they are brought together in love for the knowledge of the mystery of God, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

We must know our faith in order to share our faith. This is the goal of catechists. It is a very important AIM of the cell, but it must be lived as natural, as desired, with joy, in Catholic instruction which is animated by the Holy Spirit. Very gradually and before you realize it, the knowledge of the Catholic faith becomes ever more rooted in one's heart and mind primarily through the cell teachings but also through one another.

My wife and I both attended 12 years of Catholic school growing up. When we got married we knew we weren't experts, but we thought we knew “enough” about our faith to be able to share with our children. However we would avoid discussing our faith with other people because we very limited on many important topics. When we joined the cell group our eyes were opened. We started to realize that it's our obligation as Catholics to understand and become well versed in our Church's position on all topics such as marriage, divorce, abortion, war, euthanasia, etc. So we paid very close attention to the teachings during our cell meetings and we prayed for Him to remove the fear of speaking out on these and other important topics. Soon we found ourselves very comfortable being able to carry on conversations with family, friends, co workers and even strangers about our Faith.

Once we were named as leaders of our cell group, we were challenged even more because now we had to research the Bible or the Catechism prior to our meetings in order to be prepared to discuss and answer any questions from the group. We certainly don't have all the answers and we still have a lot to learn but we've certainly come a long way.

One of the most satisfying aspects of being a cell leader is to witness the spiritual growth of our members. Although some of the members enter the cell with a solid foundation of their Catholic faith, others remind us of when we first came into the cell, not knowing what to expect and then gradually becoming the men and women that God wants us to be.

CONCLUSION

(JN 17) Jesus says to Peter: "*Feed my sheep*" Those words come after John tells Jesus three times that he loves Him. So if we say we love The Lord, and we tell Him that we love him in our prayers, shouldn't we be feeding His sheep? And what better way than to invite everyone we know to come join a cell group? My family has been blessed so abundantly; we feel we have the obligation to bring people to closer to Him, to teach them about Him, and to show them His love in hopes that they will love Him in return.

Yes, we as Disciples are mandated to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ; BUT also to bear witness. (JP2) stated "Evangelization begins with witness. It is primarily by the Church's conduct, (and we are the church) and by living fidelity to the Lord Jesus, that the Church will evangelize the world". Witness, in imitation of Christ, is expressed in a solid prayer life, simplicity of lifestyle, respect for the dignity of all people, and a compassionate participation in the works of charity and justice: "in short, the witness of sanctity" JP2 also said "The witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission".

In his closing Mass for World Youth Day Rio, Pope Francis commissioned not only the Catholic youth of the world, but every Catholic. He called each of us to be a missionary without borders. He referenced the Great Commission, when Jesus called us to "Go and make disciples of all nations," and explained that "this is a command that the Lord entrusts to the whole church and that includes you."

Pope Francis is right, of course. We're all called to share God's love by bringing Christ's message of hope to the world. Everyone has a deep, spiritual need to know God, and this search for Truth can only be satisfied in and through Jesus Christ. Pope Francis talked about this in his final homily. "The life of Jesus is a life for others," he said. "It is a life of service."

But the Holy Father didn't just leave it at that. He encouraged his listeners with specifics. He explained that this call "means bearing personal witness to the love of God, it is overcoming our selfishness, it is serving by bending down to wash the feet of our brethren, as Jesus did." When we hear those words, we should be challenged by what such a commission demands of us. "Sharing the salvation of Christ", the Holy Father explained, "is not born from a desire for domination or power, but from the force of love." He went on to say: "Bringing the Gospel is bringing God's power to pluck up and break down evil and violence, to destroy and overthrow the barriers of selfishness, intolerance and hatred." What a powerful message! What a worthy calling!

Whether you're a cell member or a leader, or maybe you've never experienced a cell meeting and you're just curious, we hope you've enjoyed our presentation. And we pray that you now know a little more about the seven aims of a cell group. May The Lord Bless us, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of The Holy Spirit AMEN!