



DISCIPLES IN MISSION®

A PROVEN METHOD OF EVANGELIZATION

CARA Study Demonstrates the Effectiveness of *Disciples in Mission*

*Research shows
that Disciples in
Mission brings
about spiritual
growth and
fosters increased
commitment
to Catholic
evangelization.*

In August 2001 the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) completed a study of parishioners' experience of *Disciples in Mission* in the Archdiocese of Portland in Oregon and in the Dioceses of Altoona-Johnstown, Galveston-Houston, Marquette, Norwich, and Victoria in Texas. Through questionnaires, CARA collected data on parishioners' experience of the Lenten faith-sharing groups (4,482 responses) and the Parish Reflection Day (2,287 responses). Almost all of those completing the questionnaires were from the Archdiocese of Portland and the Dioceses of Norwich and Victoria.

Disciples in Mission is a three-year evangelization experience in parishes. The faith-sharing groups meet during the Lenten season and the Parish Reflection Day occurs during the Easter season. Group members discuss the Sunday lectionary readings through an evangelizing lens to prepare for Easter. Those participating in the Parish Reflection Day give input regarding the three goals and their objectives from the U.S. bishops' document, *Go and Make Disciples: A National Plan and Strategy for Catholic Evangelization in the United States*. The Parish Reflection Day provides valuable information for the pastor, parish council, and parish staff, which affirms the parish's commitment to evangelization and suggests strategies to reach its full evangelizing potential.

The Lenten Small Group Experience

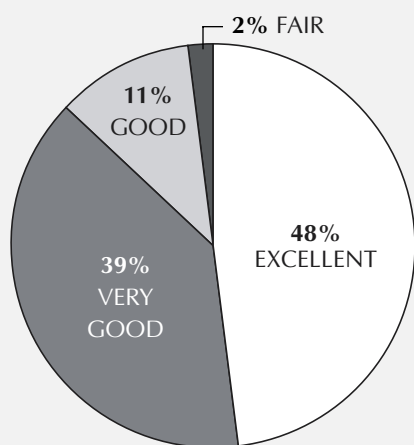
Many pastors and parish leaders today are looking for ways to involve parishioners in small groups. Through *Disciples in Mission*, parishioners join faith-sharing groups that meet six times during the Lenten season. They prepare for the meetings by reading the Sunday lectionary readings and the Small Group Participant's Booklet. The booklet contains commentary on the readings, prayer and ritual experiences, questions for faith sharing, and suggestions for individual and group action.

How did parishioners rate their *Disciples in Mission* small group experience?

Overall, this ministry provides a very good to excellent experience. The sharing on the Sunday lectionary readings creates new encounters with Christ and brings about ongoing conversion. (See Figure 1)

FIGURE 1

Overall evaluation of the small group experience



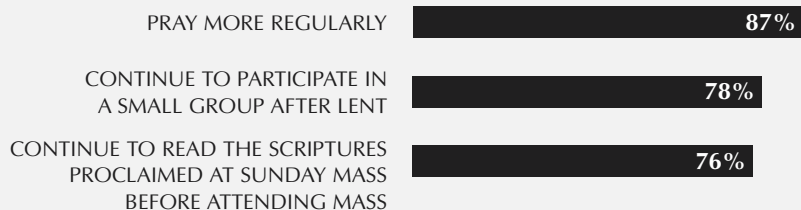
Does participating in the small group encourage new spiritual practices?

The more parishioners are centered in Christ, the greater the possibility that they will witness to their faith. Participating in *Disciples in Mission* does encourage new spiritual practices. (See Figure 2)

FIGURE 2

How much has participation in the small group encouraged you to do the following?

Percent indicating either "Somewhat" or "Very Much"



How did parishioners grow in Christ as they participated in the small groups?

The small group experience provides many avenues for spiritual growth. The graph below identifies six areas in which significant growth occurred through *Disciples in Mission*. (See Figure 3)

How did those in the small groups experience the other *Disciples in Mission* activities?

In addition to offering the group experience, *Disciples in Mission* invites parishioners to participate in a prayer campaign to intercede for God's blessing on this ministry. There are also Homily Guides to assist those preaching during the Lenten season,

catechetical bulletin inserts to educate parishioners about Catholic evangelization, and Family Activity Booklets which involve families in faith sharing and activities centered around the lectionary readings. These activities are designed to provide different, but complementary, encounters with Christ. The parishioner evaluation is given on the next page. (See Figure 4)

Who attended the small group meetings?

Disciples in Mission was created to engage many parishioners in an evangelizing experience. The data show that 67 percent of those in the small groups said they were not volunteer parish ministers or paid staff persons, whereas 29 percent said they were

FIGURE 3

How much have these increased for you personally as a result of your participating in the small group?

Percent indicating either "Somewhat" or "Very Much"

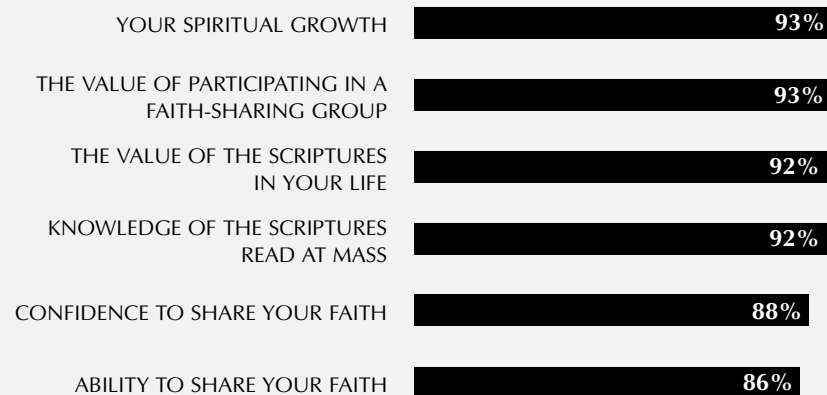
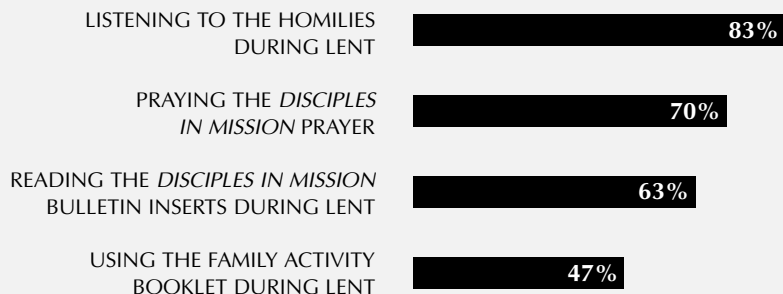


FIGURE 4

Please rate these *Disciples in Mission* activities.

Percent rating activities as "Very Good" or "Excellent"



parish volunteers, 2 percent were paid full-time staff persons, and 2 percent were paid part-time staff persons.

What was the experience of Hispanics/Latinos(as) who participated in the small groups?

The *Disciples in Mission* materials are available in Spanish in order to foster a multicultural experience and serve Hispanic/Latino(a) Catholics. Based on responses from 284 questionnaires in Spanish, CARA found that, overall, the Hispanic/Latino(a) participants responded more favorably than Caucasian/Whites. For example, 61 percent of those who are Hispanic/Latino(a) rated their overall evaluation of the small group experience as "excellent" compared to 45 percent of those who are Caucasian/White.

What open-ended comments did parishioners make regarding their experience in the small group?

Here is a sampling.

- This was a very positive and enriching experience. I am looking forward to other church group experiences like this.
- My small group was great! We really had some good discussions and bonded together.
- Participating in this group reaffirmed my commitment. It was a very worthwhile experience. It increased the bond we have with each other and my own spiritual growth was enhanced. And I received a great grace as a result of this participation.
- *Disciples in Mission* truly galvanized our parish. It became an instrument, not only for spiritual growth, but very

likely the impetus for evangelization. Many participants began inviting their non-Catholic friends and/or fallen away Catholics to join their groups and/or to come to Mass on Sunday. People responded well to these invitations. DM strengthened everyone's faith and built Christian community among us. It empowered the laity to be evangelizers.

- I feel it has brought me closer to God in many ways.
- The experience heightened my awareness that Jesus' love and forgiveness is unlimited and operative in all of our lives. I have renewed fervor to be a faithful disciple of the Lord.
- This has been a very rich experience. Too often faith is seen as a God-me experience. Sharing really gives substance to the body of Christ.
- Participating in *Disciples in Mission* has renewed my interest in reading the Bible.
- I enjoyed *Disciples in Mission* very much. I would like to continue through the year, not just during Lent.
- Our group consisted of my parents, ages 85 and 80, my sister age 53, my brother age 41, and me, age 55 (female). The weekly faith sharing led us into discussions we have never attempted. We have shared a religion and never really talked about it for our entire life. Thank you! We look forward to the next series.
- Best Lent of my life! Most glorious Easter of my life! I always used to wonder if I was really living the Lenten and Easter season to the fullest—but did this year. I have no doubt I did.

The Parish Reflection Day Experience

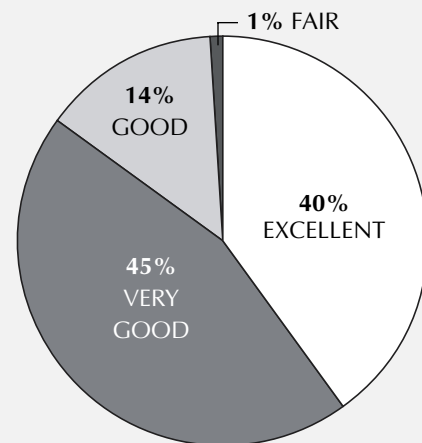
Many pastors and parish leaders today are focusing their efforts on the Church's evangelizing mission. *Disciples in Mission* offers parishes an effective way to do this through implementing the U.S. bishops' document, *Go and Make Disciples*. The Parish Reflection Day enables parishioners to give input on the three goals of this document, and their objectives, and to affirm current evangelizing ministries. Parishioners also give suggestions for new ministries through which the parish can become even more Christ-centered, reach out to inactive Catholics and the unchurched, and foster gospel values in the family, the neighborhood, and in society.

How did parishioners rate their experience of the Parish Reflection Day?

It was a very good to excellent experience. (See Figure 5)

FIGURE 5

Overall evaluation of the Parish Reflection Day

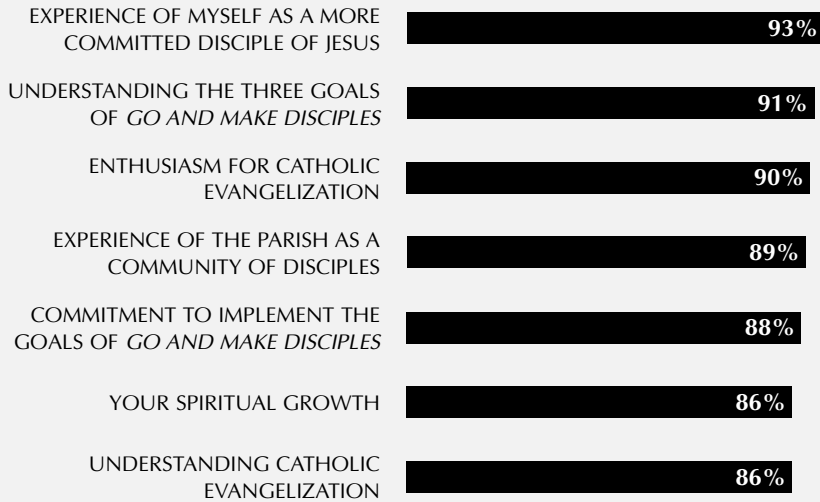


Other aspects of this day were rated as "very good" or "excellent," including the facilitation by the moderator

FIGURE 6

How much do you think these have increased for you personally as a result of participating in this reflection day?

Percent indicating either "Somewhat" or "Very Much"



(83%), the group discussion of the three goals of *Go and Make Disciples* (81%), and the presentation on evangelization (74%).

How does the Parish Reflection Day move the parish's evangelization agenda forward?

Parishioners engaged in the Church's evangelizing mission must be rooted in Christ, familiar with Catholic evangelization, and committed to living and sharing their faith. *Disciples in Mission* fosters the Catholic evangelizing mission in a number of ways. (See Figure 6)

How did those participating in the Parish Reflection Day experience the other parts of *Disciples in Mission*?

Many participating in the Parish Reflection Day also were members of a faith-sharing group during Lent,

prayed the *Disciples in Mission* prayer, read catechetical bulletin inserts, listened to homilies, and used the Family Activity Booklet. The CARA study found that their experience was very positive. (See Figure 7)

Who attended the Parish Reflection Day?

Somewhat different from the Lenten small groups, parishioners more directly associated with parish ministry participated in the Parish Reflection Day. The CARA study showed that 49 percent of those attending the Parish Reflection Day said they were not volunteer parish ministers or paid staff persons, while 45 percent said they were volunteer parish ministers, 4 percent were paid full-time staff persons, and 2 percent were paid part-time parish staff persons.

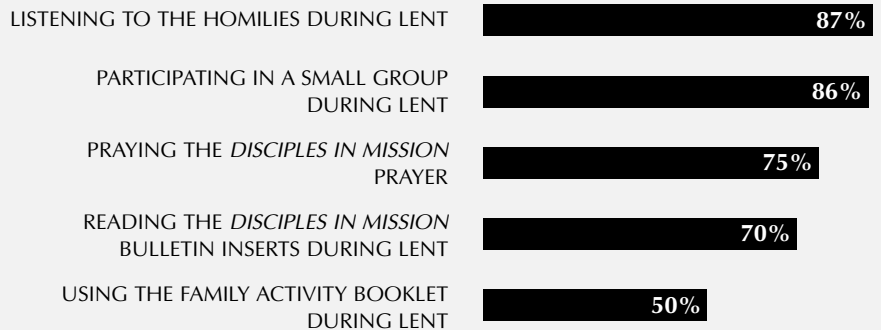
What was the experience of Hispanics/Latinos(as) who participated in the Parish Reflection Day?

Disciples in Mission is designed to provide the Hispanic/Latino(a) community many opportunities to participate in the evangelizing mission of the Church. Similar to the Hispanics/Latinos(as) who were members of

FIGURE 7

Please rate these *Disciples in Mission* activities.

Percent rating activities as "Very Good" or "Excellent"



Disciples in Mission small groups, those participating in the Parish Reflection Day rated their overall experience higher than Caucasians/Whites. Based on data from 236 questionnaires, CARA found that Hispanic/Latino(a) respondents are more likely than Caucasians/Whites to evaluate as "excellent" the overall Parish Reflection Day (57 percent compared with 37 percent).



An Evangelization Experience

For more information about *Disciples in Mission*, please contact the Paulist National Catholic Evangelization Association
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