

On the afternoon of Saturday 1st March 2014 a group of 25 from around the Diocese met in Rushden to explore the potential of Parish Small Communities.

Small, basic or so-called 'living' communities are gatherings where "where the faithful can communicate the Word of God and express it in service and love to one another; these communities are true expressions of ecclesial communion and centres of evangelisation, in communion with their pastors." (Christifidelis Laici, 26, Pope John Paul II)

Experience from other countries has shown that there is a great potential for Parish Small Communities both in encouraging mission and for building community within the parish. A small group from St Peter's RC Parish, Rushden have been to Milan to receive formation and during the afternoon Monica and Carole shared an overview of what they discovered. The parish hope to formally launch the project later in the year. An article from the Good news magazine outlining their experience of formation in Italy on Parish Evangelising Cells can be read here:

<http://www.ccr.org.uk/archive/gn1309/goodnews.htm>

We also heard from Maria Heath, Pastoral Worker at St Gregory the Great RC Parish, Northampton who at the request of Fr Andrew Behrens, the priest in charge of the parish, has been developing Small Communities for the past 3 years. The initial small community has now grown into two communities which meet twice a month throughout the year. It was emphasised that the training and mentoring of new leaders is a key aspect and that this is a gradual process so that the project can be well established on firm foundations. Providentially Bishop Peter Doyle came for a parish visitation during the following weekend and spent some time with members of the small communities. He was therefore able to hear first hand from the members about the benefits and fruits of being part of the small communities.

As well as the participants who were gathered from 6 parishes in our Diocese we also welcomed Fr Jonathan Cotton from the Nottingham Diocese who shared his experience of starting small communities in his parish. Through sharing of experiences and conversation we explored various aspects of the process of setting of small communities. It was agreed that another information day will be held in 2015 where we hope to draw on the experiences of other parishes in England who have had experience of this project.