

Frequently asked...about Parish Evangelisation Cells and the Parish Evangelisation Cell System

What...

What is a Parish Evangelisation Cell?

A group of six to 12 people, initially made up from parishioners. The cell group meets fortnightly, normally in a member's home.

What happens at a cell meeting?

Meetings follow a set format, including praying and praising God together and listening to input from the Parish Priest (on a recording of some kind). The meetings focus on praying for and finding ways to reach out with the Gospel to family, friends, neighbours, school friends, workmates etc -- in other words, evangelisation.

Who...

Who can be in a cell?

Anybody. Initially, each cell will be made up of parishioners who have put themselves forward to join a cell group. But it is hoped that each cell will then attract new members. The new members may be folk from inside the Parish or people who used to come to Church but have stopped doing so. Or they may be people (family, friends, neighbours, school friends, workmates and so on) without a Church background.

Is there an age limit on membership?

Initially, membership of cells will be limited to those of confirmation age upwards. We may re-visit this, with a view to having cells for younger parishioners, as we move forward. There is no upper age limit.



When...

On what day and at what time will cell group meetings take place?

Cell group meetings will be held fortnightly, with each cell group meeting in the same (Monday to Saturday) week. We have found, for those who can meet in the evening, that Tuesday evening tends to work quite well (because many Parish groups meet on the other days). But we expect that cell groups will meet on different days of the week and at different times of the day. When you ask to join a cell group, you will be asked on the application form to say which days and times would work for you. It will be up to the cell leader to liaise with the cell group members to find days and times which work for everybody.

When will the initial cell groups start to meet?

During the first week of Advent 2013.



Why...

Why do the groups focus on evangelisation?

Because evangelisation -- proclaiming the good news about Jesus Christ -- is central to the Church's mission. But the cell groups also help members to learn more about, and to deepen, their faith. They are small, loving and supportive mini-communities within the wider Parish community.

Isn't evangelisation Protestant rather than Catholic?

No. The Catholic Church is quite clear about this -- evangelisation is what the Church is all about; and it is the responsibility of each member of the Church, not just our clergy and those in religious orders.

Are cells a new idea? And why are the groups called "cells"?

They're not really new at all -- remember that the early Church was formed of small groups meeting in people's homes. They are called "cells" because they are intended to attract new members, grow and eventually divide.



Joining...



How can I join a cell group?

You will be able to apply to join a cell group from the middle of October by completing an application form. During November, the initial groups to commence at the start of Advent will be formed from those who have applied. Patience may be needed if it turns out that more people apply than can be accommodated in the initial groups. Once the cell system has got going, a parishioner will be able to ask to join a cell group at any time (and of course parishioners may be asked to join a particular cell group by members of the cell).

How will the cell group allocations work? Can I choose to be in a cell with my spouse/friend/parent/partner?

Fr Victor will, in consultation with the steering group, be forming the initial cell groups. Until the applications come in, it is very difficult to be definitive about how this process will work. But it is likely to involve an age component (for instance, having one or more groups specifically for young people and putting people in their 50s and 60s in a group together rather than with people in their 20s and 30s). We understand that spouses will want to decide whether to be in the same cell or different ones, for example taking into account childcare needs. We will consider carefully any other request which you make to be in the same cell as another person.

Leadership...

Who will lead the cells?



Each cell group will have a leader and a co-leader chosen by Fr Victor. These are important roles and great emphasis is being placed on the careful selection (by Fr Victor) and formation of the initial leaders and co-leaders. Going forward, the development and training of new potential leaders will be a key task of each cell group leader.

Can I be a leader or co-leader?

If you feel you might be called to be a cell group leader or co-leader, you should speak to Fr Victor in the first instance. He has the responsibility to discern, from those who put themselves forward or are put forward by others, who would be suitable leaders and co-leaders and what training and formation they need before taking on the role.

Venue...

Where will the cell groups meet?

Generally in the homes of members of the cell.

Can my cell group meet in my flat or house if I am not a cell leader or co-leader?

Each cell should have a settled meeting place, normally the home of a cell member (not necessarily the cell group leader or co-leader). Fr Victor will be suggesting venues for the initial cell groups. So if you'd be willing and able to host your group, mention this on your application form and he'll consider it.



I am disabled or not as mobile as I used to be. Will cell groups meet in an accessible place -- even in my house or flat?

See the above answer to the question 'Can my cell group meet in my flat or house...?' Remember to note on your application form if you have a disability or access issues which we need to take into account.

Oversight and teaching...

Who will exercise oversight over the cell groups?

In order for the Parish Evangelisation Cell system to work properly, careful and consistent oversight will be necessary. Fr Victor as Parish Priest will have the ultimate responsibility for oversight of the cell system, but he will not be able to carry this responsibility on his own. So we will initially have a small steering group with which each cell group leader will meet regularly to discuss their cell group and its progress and problems. As the system expands, it may become necessary to develop a more layered oversight process.

Who provides the teaching?

The teaching input at each cell group meeting will come from the Parish Priest (on a recording of some kind). This is one of the aspects of the evangelisation cell system which helps to maintain unity between each cell group and the Parish. There will be a brief opportunity at the cell group meeting to talk about the teaching input and to raise any questions to which it may give rise.



Growth...

How will cells grow?

By prayerfully reaching out to people known to cell group members (not only other members of the Parish but also family, friends, neighbours, school friends, workmates and so on). This may involve supporting the potential members in a variety of ways, taking advantage of opportunities to talk to them about Jesus. And (perhaps after a long period of support and prayer) inviting them to join the cell group. They may be already Catholic, but no longer practising; they may not have a Church, or a Catholic Church, background.

What if a cell group gets too big?

The aim of the cells is to grow -- and then divide. So if a cell is getting too big, it will be necessary for it to divide. Looking forward to that possibility, it will be one of the responsibilities of cell group leaders to identify and develop potential future cell group leaders and co-leaders. Decisions about division of a cell group will be taken by the steering group in consultation with the cell group leader.



What if I want to form my own cell group?

No one will have their own cell group. All of the cell groups will be part of the Parish and subject to the oversight of the

steering group and ultimately Fr Victor. This is essential in maintaining the unity of the cell groups with the Parish. If you see yourself as a possible cell group leader or co-leader, you should talk about this with your cell group leader or approach Fr Victor. He has the responsibility to discern whether a particular person would be a suitable cell group leader or co-leader.

Journey in Faith...

How will the cells relate to our Journey in Faith process?

Whilst, for some, joining a cell group will be a step on the way to becoming a Catholic, the cell groups will not be replacing Journey in Faith. The teaching input provided to cell groups will not be tailored to the needs of those who are ready to explore seriously whether to join the Church. Rather, a cell group member who wishes to explore the possibility of coming into full communion with the Catholic Church will be encouraged to join Journey in Faith. Conversely, people who go through the Journey in Faith process and come into full communion with the Catholic Church will be encouraged to join cell groups.

Questions...

I don't like coming out at night -- will I have to if I want to be part of the cell group? We hope that we will have some cell groups meeting during the day. When you apply to join a cell group, you will be asked on the application form to say which days and times would work for you. It will be up to the cell leader to liaise with the cell group members to find days and times which work for everybody.

Will I be able to get a lift home?

It will be up to each cell group, and particularly the cell group leader, to ensure that each member who needs a lift to and from meetings is looked after.

Other questions?

If you have any other question about cell groups, contact the Parish office (who will pass it on) or speak to Fr Victor or any member of the Parish Co-responsibility Group.



I'm worried...

I'm worried that the cell groups are really closet charismatic groups. Do I have to be a charismatic to join one?

You certainly don't -- anyone in the Parish wanting to join a cell group will be welcome to do so. Some features of the cell group meeting format will be very familiar to those who have experienced charismatic groups or meetings -- for example, the section devoted to prayer and praise. But praising God, praying for members of the group and others and listening to teaching from our Parish Priest are not activities reserved to charismatics -- they are for all of us! If you are worried about whether you will feel at home in a cell group, that's only natural. Why not follow Jesus' advice - - "Come and see!"

My big worry is...

I'm worried that the cell groups will cause disunity within the Parish, becoming separate mini-churches - dividing the Parish into "us and them" The Parish Evangelisation Cell system is, as its name implies, part of the Parish. Each cell group will be part of the Parish. Each cell group leader will be chosen by the Parish Priest. The system and each cell group will be subject to oversight by a steering group led by the Parish Priest.

We hope that membership of a cell group will for some be a stepping stone to a much greater involvement in the life of the Parish. Where a cell group is working well, it will be building its members up as part of the wider body of the Parish and attracting new members to the cell group and to the Parish as a whole. Those of us who have been to Milan will testify that the cell group system has immeasurably enhanced the life of the Parish of St Eustorgio.

On the other hand, we expect there will be people in the Parish who are fully involved in the life of the Parish but who will choose not to join cell groups. Their contribution to our Parish life will not be in any way diminished or downgraded in importance because of that. Nor will their co-responsibility for the life and well-being of the Parish be any the less. No "us and them"; only "us".

I'm worried that the cell group system will undermine other groups and activities within the Parish

The cell groups will have a different function and place in our Parish life from those of our existing groups and activities. The cell groups will not interfere with or undermine those other groups and activities. In fact we hope that, by breathing new life into the Parish, they may well provide support and new enthusiasm of many of our groups and activities.

"Building on our history and strengths" is one of the planks of the Vision for the Parish put forward by Fr Victor. We are not about to set aside or downgrade the many important things we already do as a Parish. In fact, we are committed to trying to improve them still further. Which is why the Parish Pastoral Plan, recently unveiled by the Parish Co-responsibility Group, covers all aspects of our Parish life, not just evangelisation and the cell group system.