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SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

*Groups offer new insights
to more personal church*

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When Monsignor Thomas Spadaro was assigned to Good Shepherd Church in Holbrook, N.Y., in 1982, he found a parish he described as "totally fragmented."

A fire had destroyed the church and rectory. The 12-year-old parish was in debt. Parishioners were alienated and suspicious after going through four pastors in 12 years, the priest recalled.

One of his first actions as pastor was to outline a seven-phase plan for rebuilding the 4,000-family parish.

That process began with the staff serving as a model of how to work as a small community — praying and sharing together on a regular basis.

Today, the parish has a new church and rectory. It is current with its bills.

And it is home to 18 small Christian communities — or, as they are referred to in the parish, small church communities — in various stages of development.

"I do not profess to say that (forming small church communities) is a panacea to fix every problem," Monsignor Spadaro said. "But I believe that the way of being church is through providing support."

And increasingly in the Catholic Church in the United States and around the world, one way of "being church" is through small Christian (or church) communities.

The Diocese of Rochester is paying particular attention to the concept of small Christian communities. Indeed, one of the five priorities the diocese established at the General Synod, held Oct. 1-3, 1993, was the promotion of such communities.

As part of the follow-up efforts to the Synod, the analysis team considering how to implement this particular recommendation scheduled six listening sessions around the diocese — with the first two taking place May 16 and 25, and the next session slated for June 6 at St. Mary's Church in Waterloo. Additional sessions are slated for Geneseo (June 7), Horseheads (June 8) and Ithaca (June 9).

Meanwhile, the diocesan Department of Professional Development's Ministry Day on May 17 focused on small Christian communities. Monsignor Spadaro and Father Arthur Baranowski, president of the National Alliance for Parishes Restructuring into Communities, explained the theology and nature of these communities to the 321 people who took part in the day.

Explaining just what these communities are — and are not — is one of the reasons the synod analysis team has scheduled listening sessions, said Father Robert Kreckel — a team member and pastor of St. Mary of the Lake Parish in Ontario — at the listening session held May 16 at Rochester's St. Theodore Church.

Speaking about the responses parishes submitted last fall on a questionnaire con-

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