

ADVENT AWAKENINGS

ORGANIZING SIGN-UP SUNDAY/WEEKEND

Why a sign-up Sunday/Weekend?

Sign-up Sunday/Weekend has proven to be a very effective strategy for getting the greatest number of parishioners to join small Christian communities. The liturgical environment, the music, and the hospitality are all ways to communicate that something special is happening on this weekend. During all the Masses, an invitation is extended to parishioners to sign up for *Advent Awakenings*.

Selecting the right speaker

Selecting the right speaker is key to the success of Sign-up Sunday. RENEW recommends the selection of two speakers – a man and a woman who are respected in the parish, who can motivate others, and who have a passion about the process. It is also appropriate that the speakers represent the demographic makeup of your parish.

The speakers must understand the importance of their role in the sign-up process; they are the medium for the message, the ones who will convey a personal invitation to the people in the pews. The speakers will also guide parishioners through the sign-up process.

The speakers need a good working knowledge of the points for the talk, and they must speak clearly with conviction and enthusiasm.

The invitation to sign up

The talk in which parishioners are invited to sign up for *Advent Awakenings* is given at each Mass on Sign-Up Sunday or Weekend. In addition to its role in attracting people to sign up, this talk is the primary means of educating people about *Advent Awakenings*.

The talk is motivational and must include the following:

- **An overview of the process and its benefits.** Many of our spiritual and human needs are met in small Christian communities. Participants attest to growing in their faith, experiencing meaningful relationships, and discovering connections between faith and their daily lives. Small Christian communities motivate us to find time and space to sort out the demands of our complicated, busy lives and give time to God and community.

- **The timeframe for the process.** Ninety minutes once a week for four weeks.
- **A description of small communities.** Small communities consist of eight to twelve people who gather in someone's home or at the parish to share faith on a day and at a time of their choosing.
- **An emphasis on a relaxed atmosphere.** The atmosphere in a small Christian community is informal. Each person is respected, and no one is forced to talk. A trained leader helps facilitate the prayer and sharing.
- **A visual presentation of the faith-sharing book.** The speaker shows the faith-sharing book during the presentation and makes it available afterward. Faith-sharing includes prayer, Scripture readings, reflections, responses to faith-based questions, and an invitation to connect faith with the activities of everyday life.
- **Instructions on how to sign up.** Sign-up cards and pencils are located in the pews. The speaker explains that after the congregation has had an opportunity to fill them out, the cards will be collected by the hospitality ministers. Your parish may choose to prepare a special basket in which to place the cards – to emphasize the special nature of this opportunity – and play a reflection song such as “I Say Yes, My Lord” (Donna Peña, GIA, Inc.) or “Here I Am, Lord,” (Daniel L. Schutte, OCP Publications) while the cards are being collected. After all cards have been gathered, they might be placed in a prominent place near the altar. A small prayer table with a faith-sharing book and a candle may be prepared ahead of time.

Liturgical environment makes a difference.

Parishioners will gauge the importance of the process not just from what the speakers say but also from the whole environment of Sign-up Sunday. You need not make elaborate plans, but provide some type of simple focus on the importance of the event. You may choose to involve those responsible for planning the Sunday Liturgy so that everyone collaborates to present a coherent theme.

Details: Some finer points of preparation

- In addition to the major tasks of Sign-up Sunday/Weekend, minor tasks behind the scenes contribute to the success of the process:
- Prepare announcements to be used for at least one week prior to the event and on the day of the event itself. Samples are available on the *Advent Awakenings* landing page at www.renewintl.org/advent.
- Create and print sign-up cards. A sample is on the landing page.
- Place cards and pencils in the pews.
- Make name tags.
- Create general information posters and flyers. Samples are available on the landing page.
- Collaborate with the celebrant and/or homilist before each Mass.

- Prepare arrangement for hospitality.
- Devise a system to collect the cards.

Further, ministers of hospitality must have a working knowledge of the process so that they can answer parishioners' questions. Identify places for extra sign-up cards to be kept after the sign-up event – the parish office or near the doors of the church might be good locations. Provide a basket at each location for the completed cards along with the organizers' contact information. In this way, late deciders and those who may have been away for the weekend will have the opportunity to sign up for the process or call an organizer if they have questions.