



# IMMACULATE HEART<sup>OF</sup>MARY CATHOLIC CHURCH

## A LETTER FROM THE PASTOR AUGUST 18, 2019

Dear friends in the Lord,

It's an often-forgotten detail of Church history that Christians met in homes for the first 300 years.

The Acts of the Apostles are rife with references: Saul of Tarsus persecuted the Church by breaking up those home-meetings, dragging disciples out of house after house and throwing them into jail. Peter was saved from execution through an all-night prayer-vigil at the home of Mary, John Mark's mother. Lydia, the first convert of the Western world, made her house into a church. Priscilla and Aquila had the most famous home-based community in history: They strengthened Paul to return to ministry and were instrumental in the conversion of Apollos.

When archeologists unearthed the house-church at Dura Europos in Syria in the early 20th century, it gave us an exciting glimpse into how Christians came together in the early 3rd century. A normal house on the outside, its interior contained a room where the local church, no more than 50 people, would gather for the Eucharist—all standing, of course!

Church buildings as we know them came about only after the deluge of converts following Constantine's embrace of Christianity in the early 4th century. Subsequent centuries would see massive basilicas, majestic cathedrals and "mega-churches," where thousands might worship under one roof. But the Catholic tradition never lost sight entirely of the genius of the small group gathering in a home.

Among its recent incarnations is the Small Christian Community, a group of 8-12 adults who come together in a living room on a regular basis to share with one another how God's story (i.e., the Sunday scripture) and their own stories have intersected, to help one another make the necessary connections between faith and everyday life.

A Small Christian Community differs in several respects from the church that gathered at Dura Europos in the 3rd century: Our SCCs do not celebrate the Eucharist in homes—we come together with the whole parish for that—and we tend to sit, not stand, when we meet! But we share this with our earliest Christian ancestors: Formed by the word of God and the apostolic tradition, we make a commitment to grow in friendship, prayer and service, hoping to become not merely a support group or a prayer group or a study group, but a tiny expression of the very Church itself.

New Small Christian Communities are forming this month at IHM. As you hear the invitation at Mass, please pray about becoming part of one of them.

Your brother in Christ's word and work,