

Hi my name is Mary Ellen Cleary
I participated in the last session of Arise.

I signed up for the Arise program having no idea what to expect.
In truth, I wasn't even sure what a faith sharing community meant.
The program itself has a guide and a weekly format to follow. The meetings were designed around a structure of scripture, prayer, music, reflection, and sharing .

It's a program that's been round the world for 30yrs or so and builds on the early church foundation of coming together in small groups to share in an intimate and a profound way how faith has impacted our lives.

I think there were almost 200 people participating in the last session and every variety of group was represented-all female or male all teens or retirees as well as all mixtures of ages and backgrounds.

My group, for which I became the facilitator, consisted of 9 people male and female, married and single spanning 6 decades
We met in an apt of a young couple in the eve after work for one night a week for 6 weeks. We were all pretty much strangers to one another but we all had one thing in common...we came bringing a desire and intention to connect w others in way that the day-to-day world just doesn't permit.

Life rarely gives us the chance to share how we
-wrestled with a monumental challenge in our lives,
-or hear the story of tenderness that occurred in the quiet moments of some personal trial
-or acknowledge the jubilation that someone felt when their silent prayers were answered
-or how we coped w the challenges of trying to be forgiving and gracious when life makes that so difficult.

Through the reflections on the readings we could hear each others world view
-colored by each persons experience of their faith,
-could see how the scriptures spoke to them an how it steered them down one path and not another.

Over the course of the 6wks we offered our insights but more importantly each week we grew closer in genuine affection for one another and the gift of God's love was truly present

We weren't perfect, we weren't even in agreement on most things
but we were so grateful to have found each other.
We felt so lucky to have this rare opportunity

It restored my faith in mankind to know that there are so many good and decent people carrying the love of god and their fellow man around with them throughout our seemingly routine existence

We didn't all speak at each meeting,
but some of the most profound sharing took place in the active listening and the trust that grew in expressing the intimacy of our faith.
It was such a privilege to be part of something so meaningful.
It fortified the spirit
We would end each meeting w refreshments, laughter and hugs, feeling reinforced and heartened and enriched in our faith in ways I would never have predicted.

Arise, for me, was a gift.
And like so many things in life, when you discover something good you want to share it with others
-so I hope you'll take a few minutes to think about signing up

I especially hope the teens will give it some consideration as you can perhaps feel supported in the way you are challenged to bring your faith into your day to day lives

I hope you will seize the day-and seize this opportunity to enrich your lives and "own" your faith experience. It is a gift to be nourished as well as cherished

. The details and specific dates are on the forms in your pews and in the back and down stairs, so please take them and stop and ask us any questions you have

I hope you will seize the day and sign up for Arise