

Good morning everyone. My name is Diana Cosgrove, and I have been a parishioner at Our Mother of Consolation for 10 years. I am here to talk to you today about my **Reach More** experience this past Lenten season. This was my third time participating in **Reach More**, so I am very familiar with the program and it definitely has piece of my heart already. However, this was my first-time doing **Reach More**, via zoom, during a global pandemic. So even though it was not entirely new to me, this experience was unique to say the least.

Prior to small group, I was having a rough year. Admittedly, not quite so rough as many, I am a homebody - one of those people who does not find it difficult to hunker down and stay at home. I have a full household with my family of five, so I never suffered from a lack of company (or noise). But like many, we were juggling a lot of new things - working from home, stints of virtual school, covid tests, mask-wearing, an anxiety-inducing news-cycle, virtual mass and a suddenly non-existent social calendar. By the time I was asked to join **Reach More** in January 2021, I welcomed the opportunity to take myself out of all of that, to meet with other adults and to make time for reflection and prayer throughout my week, something that amidst all the chaos of the past year, I had neglected to prioritize.

One of the great gifts this experience gave me was the time spent with different types of Catholics. That first Tuesday we were set to meet, I gleefully turned over the kid's bedtime responsibilities to my husband, shut the door to the office and clicked on the zoom meeting link. Aside from our fearless leader Dave Hilton, I had no idea who would greet me on my computer screen, I was thrilled to encounter 5 friendly and more importantly, brand-new faces in front of me. I should point out, my previous two experiences with **Reach More** involved people I knew very well and saw often. This time that was not the case. Now I love my family, but after an intense year of a lot of together time, having the opportunity to get to know new people was a welcome breath of fresh air. Five members of my OMC community, who all enriched our time together through their different life experiences and faith journeys. Among us we had several cradle Catholics and several who converted to our faith. As a life-long Catholic, the perspective of those who came to Catholicism by choice, at different stages of life was so refreshing and thought-provoking to me. I am so grateful for their viewpoints; it has reframed the way I look at and approach my faith.

The second thing I will forever cherish about this experience was how we chose to pray together at the end of each meeting. After we finished our discussions, we would go around and take turns sharing our prayer petitions for the week. Taking the lead from Dave, we did so in a very engaged way, going around in a circle and sharing what was on our minds, and for what we wanted to ask for God's help. Often, we prayed for others. One time we were asked specifically to pray for something we wanted for ourselves. And the most gratifying part of that was that the following week we would check in with one another, ask how things were going – and share updates. Taking others along with my own prayer intentions and in turn keeping theirs in mine throughout the week was a way of staying connected and feeling supported that after this tumultuous year, I welcomed.

I've saved the final gift of this experience for last because it's going to sound boring, but I really hope you will take it to heart. I'm grateful that I was made to schedule time to nurture my

faith. That's right, to write on my calendar, to tell my household I was going to be occupied on Tuesday nights from 7 – 8 pm, to make sure I had read the readings and pondered the questions before our meetings. I'm so grateful for all for all of that. And the reason is this: You always assume that you are going to cling to your faith in a crisis. And of course, you do – at first. But some crises drag on longer than others, and as the pandemic wore on, it then became the new normal. Covid or no covid, life goes on, and is always filled with obligations and distractions. If you're like me, it's easy to cut yourself some slack because of difficult times, and to neglect to realize that what might feel like just another obligation is actually the very thing that will ease your burdens, and help you get through the difficult moments. Making a commitment to doing something, having the support of others to keep you accountable – everybody needs that some time.

I hope you'll consider participating in **Reach More**. Put simply: It works. Participating in fellowship with your community, benefiting from the faith journey and perspectives of others, making time to reflect and to pray - it enhances your relationship with God. I'm a big fan of quotes from the saints, and the experience reminds me of this one, from Padre Pio: "The time spent for the glory of God, is never badly spent." I look forward to doing it again next year.