



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

#32 - August 2013

A Best Practice: Girlfriends in God

One of the prime ways to meet the needs of adults is to offer programs and processes for “communities of like interest” rather than opportunities planned generically, for everyone. One specific approach which many employ today is to respond to the unique needs of women and men, in the areas of spirituality, growth in faith, and their everyday life needs.

The diocese of Green Bay (among many other offerings) created a distinctive opportunity for women which has continued to grow and develop.

Where did the idea originate?

The idea for *Girlfriends in God* grew out of a women’s ministry program in the Diocese of Green Bay. The desire was for a way to gather women from various parishes together to share their faith.

It was inspired by the book, *Defiant Daughters: Christian Women of Conscience* by Marcy Heidisch (Liguori Publications, 2010), which tells the stories of Christian women. The diocese wanted to create a place where women could tell and celebrate their own local stories of faith.

What were the purpose/goals?

The purpose of *Girlfriends in God* was to gather women of all ages from across the diocese of Green Bay:

- to pamper them physically and spiritually
- encouraging them to share their own faith journeys and
- listen to the experience and wisdom gained from other women’s experiences of faith.

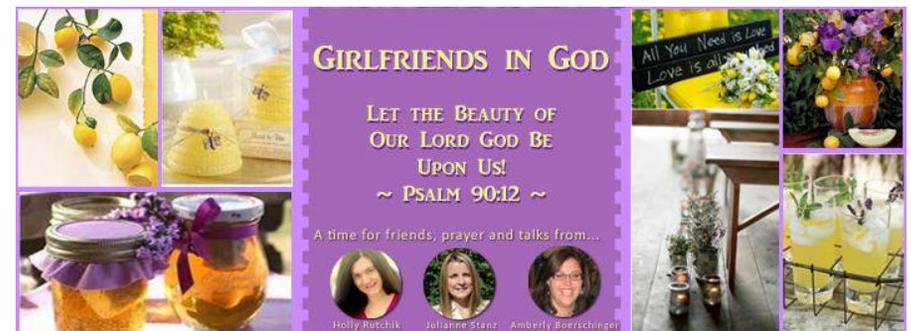
This day of pampering, good food and laughter gave busy women the opportunity to find their common ground as women of God. The day of reflection was inspiring and encouraging; the women left motivated and re-energized to continue deepening their faith journey with Christ and with their local parish community.

Who organized this endeavor?

A planning team of four women and diocesan support were the organizing committee, led by Julianne Stanz, Director of New Evangelization for the diocese of Green Bay.

How was the gathering advertised?

Girlfriends in God was primarily advertised through fancy personal invitations in mailboxes and parishes, hand-made cards, the diocesan newspaper, social media pages and word of mouth.



Was there a specific "audience" for Girlfriends in God?

In the initial planning, *Girlfriends in God* was planned for all women in the diocese of Green Bay, no matter their age, place in life or where they are in their faith journey. *Girlfriends in God* deliberately reached out to the women of the diocese who might not regularly participate in liturgy or parish programs. *All women were welcome.*

What do you think motivated people to participate?

The women responded and participated for many reasons: the time frame, liturgy, the demographic of women from all walks of life, lunch, the goodies bags, time to chat with girlfriends, the non-intimidating language of the advertising and a fresh approach to Catholic spirituality.

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- To see all the women in church for liturgy and the beautiful singing was uplifting, a great start to the day.
- All of the speakers were awesome; it's hard to pick out one! Holly really touched me with her story about her husband and Julianne with her story about her grandma.
- All the speakers were very inspiring! I appreciated the personal stories. Thanks for sharing.
- Very inspiring women. This makes everyone feel comfortable, "normal."
- Presenters showed true inner beauty through the Word of God.
- This day made me look within myself and at my self-worth.
- Thank you for the breakfast treats, lunch, gifts, crafts and the wonderful day with other Godly women. Loved every bit of the day! Looking forward to the next one!!
- This was the best thing I have been to in a long time. Thank you so much. It came at a great time.
- I have been struggling to find a group of women in a community to accept women where they are at. Thank you for making me feel accepted! We need more conferences such as these because there are so many of us that are wounded. It was a great opportunity!
- There are no negatives. All presenters were very relevant to the inner being of women. Presentations intertwined with personal stories were really beautiful

Did the committee have some thoughts about what made this offering successful/meaningful?

The committee reflected and responded to this question:

- "The opportunity for women of all ages and in all stages of faith to gather and be inspired by the everyday faith of others was the key to our success.

- It was a joyful event with just enough theology to encourage growth and reflection.
- The event met women where they were and affirmed their various vocations in life."

Women's Day of Reflection

"Girlfriends in God"

"Let the beauty of the Lord be upon us".

Psalm 90:17

Feeling less than your beautiful self?
Stressed? Frazzled?

If your calendar is full but your **soul** is on empty
Then this fun, fast and fresh day is for you.

Behold your beauty and pamper your spirit
to be **inspired as a Girlfriend in God!**

Bring your girlfriends and refresh your relationship
with God, self and others—because you're worth it!



Was the committee surprised by anything?

"We were surprised by the amount of laughter and tears and the many women who expressed how much they needed and enjoyed the event. Also surprising was the generosity of our community to aid us in putting on the event and the graciousness and thankfulness of the women in our diocese."

Has the committee witnessed growth and ramifications flowing from *Girlfriends in God*?

The committee shared their experiences in these thoughts:

"This is a one-of-a-kind event because its focus is to meet women where they are, and that works.

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- Last year's day of reflection had a waiting list, and this year women began registering before advertising was released.
- Women of our church are craving a place where they can be honest about where they are and what they need. An event of this kind provides them with that safe place.
- Both the reaction from the women regarding this need, as well as feedback from the evaluations, led to an expansion in programs in Adult Faith Formation and New Evangelization in the diocese. Schools of Prayer, including book clubs, were formed in areas throughout the diocese."

Following this first *Girlfriends in God* day, were there continuing plans? Any changes to the original plans?

The second (now annual) event (with interest from women and parishes outside the diocese) was planned around the theme: *Beauty*, which was inspired by "Let the Beauty of Our Lord God Be upon Us" (Psalm 90:17).

The schedule for the day included:

- Liturgy with Bishop Robert Morneau
- Breakfast and welcome
- First Reflection: Beauty Through the Ages
- Lunch with a reflection
- Third Reflection: Beauty in the Breaking
- Closing Prayer and Reflection

The location of *Girlfriends in God* has been changed to accommodate larger numbers. The desire and plan of the committee is to welcome every woman who wants to participate.

Flowing from the requests of the participants, the time frame was expanded to allow for more reflection, prayer and sharing.

For more information: Julianne Stanz, Director of New Evangelization, Diocese of Green Bay; 920- 272 8270; jstanz@gbdioc.org

A few other programs

- To read about a similar endeavor for women which could be adapted in several ways by parishes and (arch)dioceses: [Gussy Up Your Spirit](#)
- Group Publishing offers several ideas for
 - [retreats for women](#)
 - [small group experiences](#)

Some resources: The following are not full programs, but some resources that might be used with women's groups and events for women:

- [Called to Holiness: Spirituality for Catholic Women](#): This book series offers insight and encouragement for making sense of God and how faith fits into the world—all from a woman's perspective.

Covering such diverse topics as reflection on images of God, dealing with change and loss, nurturing families or combating social injustice, the eight *Called to Holiness* books help women find God in the midst of everyday life while empowering each on their individual faith journey.

Each volume in the series is penned by a Catholic woman theologian or expert and provides reading guides with discussion questions, rituals and applications to daily life as well as suggestions for further exploration of the topic.

- *The Gift of Years: Growing Old Gracefully* by Joan Chittister (Bluebridge, 2010)
- *The Cup of Our Life: A Guide to Spiritual Growth* by Joyce Rupp (Ave Maria Press, 2012)
- *Days of Deepening Friendship* by Vinita Hampton Wright (Loyola Press, 2009)
- *Hidden Women of the Gospels* by Kathy Coffey (Orbis Books, 2003)

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- *Walking with Wisdom's Daughters: Twelve Celebrations and Stories of Women of Passion and Faith* by Gloria Ulterino (Ave Maria Press, 2006)
- *The Jesus Women* by Marci Alborghetti (Twenty-Third Publications, 2006)
- *Women of Mercy* by Kathy Coffey (Orbis Books, 2005)
- *Women in Church History: 21 Stories for 21 Centuries* (St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2007)
- *Women in the New Testament* by Mary Ann Getty-Sullivan (Liturgical Press, 2001)
- *12 Strong Women of God: Biblical Models for Today* by Marci Alborghetti (Twenty-Third Publications, 2004)
- *Twelve Apostolic Women* by Joanne Turpin (St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2004)
- *Reading Between the Lines: The Hidden Wisdom of Women in the Gospels* by Martha Driscoll, OCSO (Liguori Press, 2006)
- *No Longer Silent: The Empowerment of Women in the Gospels* by Susan Dehn Matthews (ACTA Publications, 2011)



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A GEMS Suggestion: How might you offer something online similar to “Girlfriends in God?”

- Peruse [Days of Deepening Friendship Online Spiritual Journey](#) which provides an opportunity for spiritual growth through reflections, exercises and sharing.
- See [GEMS #11](#) for ideas on how to create an online group learning opportunity.

Additional ideas for Adult Faith Formation Planning and Best Practices can be found at:

- <http://ecatechist.com>. Click on e-books for: *40 Tips: Getting Started in Adult Faith Formation*.
- www.pastoralplanning.com. Go to Adult Formation: *Nuts & Bolts: Planning and Best Practices for Adult Formation*.