



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

#84 - December 2017

A Best Practice: Spiritual Journaling (and Sharing)

In the May 24, 2004 issue of America ([Church-ianity and Christ-ianity](#)) John C. Haughey, S.J., related that many of his non-Catholic students were not hesitant about making personal faith statements, both in the classroom and outside. Catholic students, on the other hand, seldom do so. He was aware that these Catholic young people talk about church issues and controversies or about moral values, but not about their relationship with Christ or about how they recognize God's action in their life.

Fortunately – among today's adults – that is becoming less and less true. Through various opportunities – at parishes, in homes, in restaurants, etc., – people are searching for times and ways to share their faith, experiencing that this is a way to deepen their own faith and to give support to others.

We have a story to tell,
a story filled with hope and love
and God's grace and mercy.

We've got a story of God in our lives,
a story of ways that Jesus has already been
working in our lives
sometimes without our even knowing.

- Bishop Michael Curry

This issue shares one example of faith-sharing – among the many that are occurring today.

How It Started

As many parishes, St. Daniel Parish, Clarkston, MI participated in the personal and parish spiritual renewal process *Christ Renews His Parish* (CRHP). Following the weekend experience, parishioners who had participated met weekly for six – or twelve – months. After that time they were encouraged to broaden their religious experiences and move on from CRHP.

Three women who participated together in CRHP were listening for promptings from the Holy Spirit as to what they should do next; the outgrowth of those promptings was the beginning of the Spiritual Journaling group within the parish.

These three women each had found that their daily writings of reflections on Scripture, nature, religious songs and prayer sustained them. One is active in the *Called and Gifted* group, helping people identify and work in their charisms; her writing helps her to discern God's will for her life. They all were motivated by the sharing/witnessing process that is encouraged in CRHP.

Because of their enthusiasm and leadership, a group of parishioners (and others) meet once a month to listen and to share – based on the writings each has done throughout the month.

Preceding the Gathering

All of the participants – throughout the month – include some type of writing in their spiritual practices. The diversity that is a part of the group brings much deepening for everyone:

- One woman uses her daily writing as her form of written prayer, reflecting Scripture, music, and nature.
- Another pays close attention to the new insights and promptings throughout her life as she journals about them.
- One member of the group writes letters of encouragement to people she knows as well as some she does not know. The group has encouraged her to follow up on her promptings; she has seen many fruits from her letters, people who have confided that her letter came at the best time or that it encouraged them when they needed that encouragement.
- An artist writes her thoughts through artistic script as well as images she has drawn during prayerful times.
- Many write when prompted by a reading, event, or thought that speaks to them.

GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

Writing has the power to help you see
the beauty of God at work in your life experiences.

When you express your thoughts and feelings
in a journal,
you'll be surprised by how much you discover
about God in the process –
and God will use your journal
as a tool to transform you.

- Whitney Hopler

The Gathering

About a week before the monthly gathering, an email message reminds the participants of the date, time and location as well as an invitation in the bulletin for new members. Sometimes the email suggests a specific topic that will guide the gathering; often it's just an invitation to bring something that they are willing to share.

The gathering begins with a song, sometimes a scripture verse on the suggested topic and a prayer. Then the sharing begins. Deb Schneider, one of the group members shares, "It is amazing how many times the song prompts a topic that no one organized but each of the people at the table have brought with them 'journaled' thoughts on the topic that has spontaneously surfaced."

During the gathering the group does not focus on writing but rather on listening and sharing. There is no fuss or concentration on the skill or mechanics of writing; the focus is on the message rather than the method.

Once in a while – during the gathering – they take time for writing. For instance, during Lent each person was invited to bring crucifixes or images of the cross; when they gathered they spent ten minutes writing about what these images evoked in them at this time.

Occasionally the group has gone on a field trip. One trip was to the St. Sabbas Orthodox Monastery in the surrounding area. The purpose was threefold:

- A group member was going to live in Russia for a while; the group wanted to explore the Russian Orthodox faith with her

- It was a belated Christmas get-together for the group
- It afforded the group a writing topic for the following month

At other times, the group has gone to a healing garden at a nearby health complex to change their surroundings from indoors to outdoors.

One Example

The group believes – and has experienced - that Spiritual Journaling is one way of mulling the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

One illustration of that is the following writing done and shared by one of the members during her battle with cancer.

*The sun shown in my soul the day
I was born.*

My life is uncertainty and I relish it...

*What words are there to cling to
on this day?*

These words are for action.

*Living these words brings the sun from
the soul into view for the world to notice.*

Some Comments from the Participants

- "The Spiritual Journaling group has been blessed with diversity of members and what keeps us together is God's Word and how each of us, God's disciples, interpret that Word."

GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

- “I need this sharing and reflection.”
- “I don't feel that I am a writer but I do get so much from the group.”
- “With all of the variety within the group, it amazes me as to how often each person's writings thread with the other members at the table.”
- “I have gone from never writing to never missing a chance to write.”
- “Writing my thoughts has brought me peace.”

...that I may share with you
some spiritual gift so that you may be strengthened,
that is,
that you and I may be mutually encouraged
by one another's faith,
yours and mine.

- Romans 1:11-12

- This opportunity was not created by the parish staff, but by a group of enthusiastic parishioners – with an idea. What is happening in your parish that was created and/or is being sustained by parishioners? How can parish staffs encourage and support parishioners to plan and design opportunities that meet their needs and interests?
- At times this group has changed its location from indoors to outdoors. Have you ever changed locations for some of your adult formation opportunities? How might you? (You might want to revisit [GEMS #10](#).)



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GEMS Wonderings

- Spiritual Journals. What if – for Lent – instead of a book club, each parishioner was given a journal? Each week they could be prompted to
 - reflect on Scripture
 - reflect on their journey of faith and spirituality
 - participate in an activity (e.g. pray the Stations of the Cross at a nearby cemetery; volunteer at a homeless shelter) followed by reflection questions
- This group concentrated on writings. Might there be other ways that people/groups would want to explore their spiritual journeys through art, music, movement, etc.

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

- *Deepening Faith: Adult Faith Formation in the Parish*
<https://www.litpress.org/Products/4652/Deepening-Faith>
- *The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation*
http://www.lifelongfaith.com/store/p25/The_Seasons_of_Adult_Faith_Formation.html
- *The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation website*
<http://www.lifelongfaith.com/2015-adult-faith-formation-symposium.html>