



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

#22 – October 2012

THE CONTENT OF ADULT FAITH FORMATION

...as revealed in our Best Practices Study (Part I)

Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us categorizes for us, with broad strokes, the six tasks of catechesis, giving us content areas for a comprehensive formation into life as a disciple of Jesus Christ:

- Knowledge of the Faith (*Doctrine, Teaching, Scripture, etc.*)
- Liturgical Education (*Worship, Sacraments, etc.*)
- Moral Formation (*Morality, Justice, Lifestyle, etc.*)
- Learning to Pray (*Devotion, Contemplation, Retreats, etc.*)
- Education for Community Life (*Strengthening Relationships*)
- Missionary Spirit (*Living and Spreading the Good News*)

In addition, the *National Directory for Catechesis* spells out, in some detail, these and other content areas (#48.A.3).

These content areas are comprehensive and lived out in all facets of parish life, since all parish living is formative.

For some examples of the wide variety of offerings, as well as the life of the parish itself, that fall within each area, see www.janetschaeffler.com. Go to AFF Helps and explore *What Are We Providing for Adult Faith Growth?* See especially the charts “through the lens of the six content areas.”

In the next several issues, we will explore the “content” of adult faith formation by looking at

- these guidelines from our Church documents
- some thoughts from practitioners in adult faith formation
- the content areas that were explored in the programs/processes of the best practices that were submitted in our surveys.

As we consider these guidelines, the thoughts of experts and our own everyday practices, some fascinating realities and advice will emerge for our pondering in these next few issues.

What the Surveys Said

As each respondent has replied to (and new respondents continue to) this ongoing Best Practices Study in Adult Faith Formation, they were asked to indicate **the particular focus** of their Adult Faith Formation best practice.

Analyzing these responses, they can be grouped into the following general themes or categories:

Focus of the Adult Faith Formation Best Practice	Number of Times Mentioned
Scripture	41
Sacraments, Liturgy and Liturgical Year	34
Catholic Beliefs and Tradition	27
Spirituality	23
Prayer	11
Family and Parenting, including Religious Parenting	9
Life Transitions (grief, divorce, maturing adults, death and dying, funeral preparations, etc.)	7
Parish Life/Parish Renewal/Community/Community Building	6
Human Growth (stress, communication, wellness, discerning and living gifts, etc.)	5
Catechist Formation	4
Jesus/God	3
Social Justice/Outreach	3
Leadership	2
Ecumenism/Interfaith Studies	2
Morality/moral issues	1
Connecting faith and work	1
Current Catholic Topics needing to be discussed	1

What is the point of adult faith formation?

Perhaps this is a question that has been asked – and answered – in various ways. Looking at some of the offerings in any given parish, we

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might draw the conclusion that adult formation is primarily designed to:

- support adults in their roles within the parish community (as catechists, as liturgical ministers, as Parish Council members, etc.)

and/or

- provide adults with help/directions prior to a new beginning (as parents of children preparing for sacraments, as couples preparing for marriage, etc.)

These two focuses of adult faith formation are extremely important: inviting people to participation in the parish community and walking with people/families at sacramental celebrations.

At the same time,

- the documents of today's Church *call us to more*
- the research on motivation for adult learning, challenging us to intentional listening to the life stories of each unique individual, graced by God's everyday Presence, *calls us to more*
- the various needs present in our diverse world: the many cultures, the ever-growing expanse of ages of adults, the vast array of family and life situations, etc. *calls us to more*

We are **called to conversion**. "...faith formation helps adults to acquire an attitude of conversion to the Lord. This attitude fosters a baptismal spirituality for adults." (*Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*, #69)

We are called to live a life centered in Christ. Richard Reichert (*Renewing Catechetical Ministry: A Future Agenda*) suggests that to be Jesus-centered, to be a disciple, means three things:

- to walk with, to be a companion, to be committed to Jesus
- to learn from Jesus (to think and judge like him)
- to participate in Jesus' mission and ministry (to act like him)

We are **called to be integrated persons, to connect faith and life**. Our call is not just to be Sunday Catholics, but to be faith-filled Catholics seven

days a week, in our everyday lives. Vatican II boldly proclaimed that the greatest heresy of our time was the separation that Christians make between their life in the world and their faith.

We are **called to mission**, called to bring about the Reign of God: "a mission in and to the world ... to transform the social and temporal order" (*Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*, #72). In the words of Cardinal Daniel DiNardo (2009 NPCD Convocation): "You never meet the risen Christ without getting a job."

The "point" of adult faith formation is **not only to**

- call forth and prepare better ministers, more involved members of the parish (as important as that is)
- to prepare parishioners for the celebration of the sacraments (as important as that is)

but to engage disciples...

- disciples who connect faith and life
- disciples who create a community on fire with bringing about the Kingdom of God in today's world.

Religious education that insulates us from the problems and potential of the global village in which we live does not follow Jesus' example.

- Linda J. Vogel
*Teaching and Learning in Communities of Faith:
Empowering Adults through Religious Education*

Each and every offering/process of adult faith formation, then, invites participants to:

- make the essential connection: between faith and life
- ask the fundamental question: so what?

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- go to the center of what life/faith is always all about: what does my faith mean for how I live my life today? for how I relate to all those around me? to all of God's world? to God?
- always be aware of God's creation as one: what does faith mean for how we, as a community, make decisions and engage with each other, with those around us? with those I don't see but upon whom my decisions will have an impact?

If this is the ultimate "point" of adult faith formation, it can be, it must be, accomplished, tended to, in many ways:

- in the processes used
- the varied formats employed, and
- certainly the "content" of our offerings (through the various formats)

Informing, Forming and Transforming

Another way of understanding the purpose and role of adult faith formation is to reflect on the reality that the mission of adult faith formation is to **inform, form and transform**. (See *Toward an Adult Church: A Vision of Faith Formation* by Jane Regan. Loyola Press, 2002. Pages 9-29, but especially pages 12-19.)

"Catechesis *informs* in all of the ways in which the heart and meaning of the Christian message and the church's tradition are presented in a manner that is meaningful in this time and place." (Regan, page 15)

Wondering GEMS (regarding "informing"):

- What methods, materials, opportunities and processes does your parish use to "inform" adult believers of the "heart and meaning" of the Christian message and the church's tradition?
- What aspects of Church teaching are covered well through your adult faith formation opportunities, through the life of the parish (the parish is the curriculum)?
- What aspects of Church teaching might need more attention?

"Catechesis *forms* in all the ways that people are shaped into the way of life of the believers." (Regan, page 15)

Wondering GEMS (regarding "forming"):

- What methods, materials, opportunities and processes are used to "form" adult believers?
- What activities and opportunities that "form" adults in living the faith work well for your parish?
- What aspects of "living the faith" does your parish do well?
- Are there aspects of "living the faith" that might need more attention for your parishioners?

"Catechesis *transforms* on a number of different levels...renewing and transforming the community's self-understanding of what it means to be Church in a particular time and place...and...the call to be about transforming the interactions and structures of society..." (Regan, page 16)

Wondering GEMS (regarding "transforming"):

- Has our parish life changed, grown, developed as a result of adult faith formation?
- What methods, practices, events or materials have helped "transform" our adult believers, our parish as a learning community?
- In this area of transformation, what are we doing well?
- Are there things we could do better?



Your GEMS to Share

As you – and your committees/teams - have discussed the above **Wondering GEMS**, what did you discover; what did you decide?

You're invited to share your thoughts and experiences (jschaeffler@adriandominicans.org); they will be used in subsequent issues of **GEMS** to enhance our learning together. Thank you!

What "content," then, is appropriate for the "point" of adult faith formation?

That is the perennial and all-important question; the question that needs to be asked continually and constantly. We will continue to look at it in a variety of ways for the next few newsletters.



Golden Nuggets From You

"THANK YOU for this newsletter, [GEMS #20](#). I did not have the time to read it until today (June 19th). I'll be able to use some of the ideas during my faith sharing on Friday.

- *Cris Villapando,*
Director of Faith Formation Programs, Diocese of Charlotte

This is a wonderful check list! ([A Checklist for Planning and Hosting Adult Faith Formation Gatherings](#)) I will be making copies for our committee. It's amazing that after so many offerings we have had there are things suggested on your list that we never thought of... I appreciate your GREAT mind!!!

So what are you writing about next???? This has been a very helpful series ([Welcome and Hospitality in Parish Life](#)) and I was just telling another group about GEMS. They asked me to share the info (which I did, of course!).

- *Diane Seidel, Director of Religious Education,*
St. Boniface Parish, Bay City, Michigan

"Thank you so much for the hard work that you are doing in the area of Adult Faith Formation. I copy and distribute your **GEMS** to our CAFE (Catholic Adult Formation and Education) team and we read them and discuss them often.

I was especially pleased to see this month's issue, [GEMS #19](#), devoted to StrengthsFinders. I have been playing around with this for several years now. We have a group of people who are committed to using it, but we are struggling with exactly how to use it to its potential. So everything that I can find on the topic or people who are using it, I greatly appreciate."

- *Elaine Ouellette,*
Director of RCIA and Family Faith Formation,
St. John the Evangelist Parish, Davison, MI

(We welcome your comments, thoughts, suggestions, ideas, etc. Your views and practices continually support and encourage others. Email them to jschaeffler@adriandominicans.org any time.)



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Past issues of **GEMS** are archived at www.janetschaeffler.com.

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

- <http://ecatechist.com>. Click on ebooks 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*.