



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

#75 - March 2017

A Best Practice: Ministry with Maturing Adults (Part I)

We have begun to realize that we have a “new generation” within our world and church who is in need of a unique and dedicated approach to ongoing faith development and support through all the challenges and transitions they experience: those that come with the second half of life.

Between 2010 and 2050,
the United States is projected to experience
rapid growth in its older population.
In 2050, the number of Americans aged 65
and older is projected to be 88.5 million
more than double its population of 40.2 million
in 2010.

- U.S. Department of Commerce,
Economics and Statistics Administration,
U.S. Census Bureau

http://www.eoas.acl.gov/Aging_Statistics/future_growth/DOCS/p25-1138.pdf

Pope Francis identified the growing needs of those in the second half of life, recognizing that the church has a responsibility to respond to these growing needs. Pope Francis reminded us that there is a true vocation and mission set aside for older people, who have a lot more free time at their disposal now than before. "It's still not time to 'rest on one's oars' " and just coast along, he said. Being older is certainly different, and so when it comes to finding one's new purpose in the world, seniors need to sort of "make it up" as they go along "because our societies are not ready, spiritually and morally, to give this period of life its full worth." Even "Christian spirituality has been taken a bit by surprise, and it involves sketching out a spirituality of older persons," he said. (Weekly general audience, March 11, 2015)

Many Responses

Fortunately today, parishes, dioceses and committed ministers are responding to the needs of all generations within the church, including the growing population of maturing adults.

Dr. Richard Johnson, Ph.D, a pioneer in the field of spiritual gerontology, has researched the topic extensively and concluded that, as we age, our spiritual pace quickens and we seek real opportunities to further develop our spiritual growth.

Dr. Johnson advocates for a dedicated focus on maturing adults within our parishes:

“Every successful parish ministry to maturing adults (and any other program for that matter) needs a person who is in charge, a person whose responsibility is to serve as the catalytic agent, primary visionary, and energy source for the program. In short, we need a director.

Certainly it is common for a parish to have a youth minister, an individual appropriately educated and equipped to organize, lead and shepherd a vibrant program for the young people in the parish. I see the ministry of **parish ministry for maturing adults as a similarly important position in the parish**; it requires an individual who is educated and equipped to shepherd a vibrant program for maturing adults.”

(Richard P. Johnson in *Parish Ministry for Maturing Adults: Principles, Plans & Bold Proposals*)

A **director for ministry to maturing adults** within the parish: how needed!

... in the North, the growth industry of the future is likely to be ministry to elders. What youth ministry was to the John Paul years, elder ministry will be to the twenty-first century.

- John L. Allen, *The Future Church*, page 162

One Approach

This **GEMS** issue will begin an exploration of one approach within St. Mary's Parish, Barrie, Ontario, Canada and how it has grown because of one committed person. (The exploration will be continued in the following issue.)

Building on the theology degree previously obtained before her first move into parish ministry, Sister Mary Rose Marrin, CSJ obtained a Certificate in Spiritual Gerontology. In 2007 St. Mary's Parish hired Sr. Mary Rose as a full time staff person with the title: Maturing Adults Minister. For the parish, it was very much a ground-breaking experience as the ministry was relatively unknown at the time.

A few of the beginning challenges included:

- As throughout our culture, there was a strong **anti-aging/ageist mentality** present within the parish and area (one that puts youthfulness on a pedestal and disregards the potential of older adults). Ministry with the older population recognizes loss but also the unparalleled potential for inner growth and ongoing productivity and service.
- Often when people think of elders and responding to their needs, their focus goes to "frail elders." Yet, ministry today to this age group is **inclusive of everyone from 50 – 100 years** with various life circumstances and varying needs.
- The expectations were that this ministry would promote Spiritual Growth in the Second Half of Life. As is often the reality, "spiritual growth" was identified with religious activities: liturgy, prayers, devotions, etc. There was little sense that **spiritual growth touched all aspects of life.**

The Beginning

Sr. Mary Rose began the ministry with the people themselves - home visits and conversations with small groups provided opportunities to listen to the experience, insights and hopes of the people.

This was followed by a visioning process, a series of five meetings, involving forty-three participants who developed the following Vision and Mission statements:

Our Vision: Maturing Adults continue to grow into the fullness of Christian life.

Our Mission: Our Ministry with Maturing Adults seeks to support the lifelong faith development of women and men throughout all phases of the pre-retirement and retirement years. Support means compassionate presence, respectful assistance and prayer for one another in relationships of mutual care and concern.

The on-going goals of Ministry with Maturing Adults include:

- A faith community of supportive relationships
- Participation in the ministries of the parish and in outreach activities on behalf of the wider community
- Programs of wholistic faith development and social awareness

A recent newsletter for the program summarizes some of its foundational beliefs and practices:

- Ministry with Maturing Adults presents opportunities for lifelong faith development while reaching out to the entire parish, not just those in the inner core of regular participation but also those on the edges of parish life.
- This ministry is one of inclusivity. Ministry with Maturing Adults presents opportunities to connect with each other in meaningful ways.
- In the Ministry with Maturing Adults we are working toward fullness of life through meaningful community activities with the end goal of connection and becoming missionary disciples in the second half of life.
- Redefining our retirement years through a new spiritual lens gives us reason to have hope and to see the second half of life with all its potential and excitement. All those in the second half of life are invited to participate in the programs offered through this ministry.

In summary,
**Some Core Concepts for Parish Ministry
with Maturing Adults (50+)**

(from Sr. Mary Rose Marrin, C.SJ)

- A New Pastoral Need:

Current demographics indicate that senior adults are beginning to outnumber the younger generation and are living twenty-thirty years longer than previous generations. They are a “New Generation” in need of on-going faith development and support through all the opportunities, challenges and transitions that mark the second half of life.

- Scope:

Not just “elders” but all groups in the second half of life. There are three distinct groups: pre-retired/early retired (50–70), the more seasoned retired (70–90), the elders (85-90+). Each group has specific needs.

- Inclusive:

The ministry reaches out to the entire parish, not just the inner core of regular participants but also to those on the edges of parish life and participation. It includes all the senior population: married couples as well as men and women who are single, widowed or divorced.

- Basic Premise:

As we age, our potential for inner/spiritual growth increases.

- A Spiritual Ministry:

This is a genuine parish ministry with and for maturing adults, not just a social club for seniors. Its primary aim: growth in Christian maturity.

- Goal: Support of Lifelong Faith Development through:

- Connection and Community: intentional building of connection with oneself, with the faith community, with the broader community, with the gift of creation, and with God.

- Mission: a lifelong outreach to others with an emphasis on supporting the senior population of the parish. In addition, the ministry fosters participation in the ministries of the parish and in activities of service on behalf of the wider community.

- Programmes Aimed at Transformative Learning: personal growth through reflection, insight, and wisdom, in which content addresses life issues and lived experience within the context of Christian faith.



Sr. Mary Rose (seated at the table - in the center) with some participants of the “Positive Aging” group.

The Work of the People

Sr. Mary Rose as animator of the Ministry with Maturing Adults never works alone. From the very beginning a committee was invited; the first committee consisted of the designated staff person plus four additional members (2 men and 2 women) from the maturing adults portion of the parish community and the pastor as an ex-officio member. At St. Mary's, the membership of the committee has grown over the years.

Purpose of the committee: To support and assist the Maturing Adults Minister in the implementation of the annual Plan of Action for the ministry within its stated vision, mission and goals.

Objectives of the committee:

- To generate ideas and suggestions for programmes and activities.
- To review plans and give suggestions for events, projects, and programmes.
- To facilitate implementation by enabling and supporting others in taking on leadership roles, usually on an ad hoc basis.
- To review activities undertaken and to make recommendations for future action.
- To work collaboratively within the over-all parish plan with a commitment to the unity of parish life.
- To make recommendations for the on-going development of the ministry.

Mining the GEMS: some things you might want to think about

- What percentage of your parish falls in this age group?
- What in this **GEMS** issue challenged you?

- Did something in this **GEMS** issue spark a new idea in you?
- Is there someone(s) in your parish who might be interested/enthused about bringing something like this to birth?

- What programs are you already doing for this age group?
- In your marketing, do you help maturing adults realize that you have planned for them; how a given program might be an opportunity for them?

To Be Continued

In our next issue, we will look specifically at some programs and opportunities that are – or can be – offered for the maturing adults of our parishes. In the meantime

Some Resources You Might Want to Explore

- *Parish Ministry for Maturing Adults: Principles, Plans and Bold Proposals* by Richard P. Johnson
- *The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation* edited by John Roberto

- *Second Childhood: Aging into Divine Relationship* by Christine Kresho, CSJ
- *The Second Half of Life: Opening the Eight Gates of Wisdom* by Angeles Arrien

- *You'll Never Be Younger: A Good News Spirituality for Those Over 60* by William J. O'Malley
- *Autumn Gospel: Women in the Second Half of Life* by Kathleen Fischer

- *Aging: The Fulfillment of Life* by Henri Nouwen
- *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life* by Richard Rohr

- *The Gift of Years: Growing Older Gracefully* by Joan Chittister
- *The Grace in Aging: Awaken as You Grow Older* by Kathleen Dowling Singh

- *The Grace in Dying: How We are Transformed Spiritually as We Die* by Kathleen Dowling Singh
- The Fall 2015 issue of *Lifelong Faith*:
<http://www.lifelongfaith.com/journal.html>

The task of this period of life is not simply to endure the coming of the end of time. It is to come alive in ways I have never been alive before.

- Joan Chittister, *The Gift of Years*



Adding New Luster to an Older Gem

In **GEMS** issues #3-9, #15-18, #46-48 and # 56-58 we explored hospitality within our parishes and within adult faith formation.

You might want to explore these articles:

- Seven Things Church Guests are Telling Us:
<http://thomrainer.com/2016/07/seven-things-church-guests-telling-us/?utm>
- The Best Way to Retain Visitors:
<http://effectivechurch.com/blog/the-best-way-to-retain-visitors/>
- The book, *Unwelcome: 50 Ways Churches Drive Away First-Time Visitors*:
<http://www.cfclabs.org/unwelcome/>
- We Need Coffee Hour Now More Than Ever:
<http://www.uscatholic.org/articles/201611/we-need-coffee-hour-now-more-ever-30820?utm>



Golden Nuggets from You

“This (**GEMS #51**) is great especially in light of the Laudato Si, Pope Francis’ encyclical on the environment.”

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

“I loved your **GEMS #54** on book discussions. I lead a book group at the parish and we alternate between fiction and nonfiction. We have great faith discussions with both genres. I was especially inspired by the links you included

on “little libraries.” I had no idea there was a website for it. There's a “little library” near town hall in Dedham and my brother sent me a picture of one a year ago that his neighbor put up in his front yard. However, until I got **GEMS**, inspiration did not strike.

Now I realize this is a great idea for the parish. We actually have a parish library of 600 donated books but with the New Evangelization in mind, I am going to work on getting a “little library” near our parking lot to try to reach people who don’t know about the library in our church basement.

- *Mary Lemire-Campion, Pastoral Associate
St. Agatha Parish, Milton, Massachusetts*



Janet Schaeffler, OP
www.janetschaeffler.com
jschaeffler@adriandominicans.org

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

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>