



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

#83 - November 2017

A Best Practice: Milestones Ministry

All of us know the foundational principle – and want to implement practices - that respond to the reality that faith formation (for all ages) does not happen only in a “classroom” or lecture/4 week workshop format.

Formation and growth in the faith can happen all the time, especially in the 24/7 of everyday life.

More and more research tells us, too, that people are most open to learning and most affected by their faith in the transition times of life, the joyous celebrations and the complicated challenges.

Another way to name these meaningful moments is through the lens of milestones. When we pause and think about our lives we realize that they have been – and are – filled with many milestones:

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| Birthdays | A new job |
| Anniversaries | Cancer diagnosis |
| New homes | Grandparenthood |
| Graduations | Paying off a car |
| Pregnancy | Retirement |
| Miscarriage | Snowbirds traveling south |
| Blended family | The end of medical treatment |
| Loss of a pet | Anniversaries of death |

... and the list could go on and on.

Within our faith community, we also celebrate milestones continually:

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|----------------------|-------------------|
| Baptism | First Eucharist |
| First Reconciliation | Confirmation |
| Marriage | Illness and Death |

... and the list could go on and on.

We usually do a good job with celebrating milestones within our parishes. What about our everyday milestones? Are they – could they – be connected with our faith?

Why couldn't they be... why shouldn't they be ... for us who believe – and have experienced - that God is intimately with us in our everyday life, our joys and sorrows, our hopes and dreams, our challenges and delights?

In addition to the Sacraments we celebrate with our parish family, sacramental (holy/sacred/God-with-us) moments happen all the time in our daily lives

“A faith milestone is a marker along life’s journey that says, ‘This is something important and God is here, too.’ It is a faith formation practice for both home and congregation that helps all generations recognize God’s presence in everyday life.”

*- Dr. David W. Anderson,
Co-Director at Milestones Ministry*

What is Milestones Ministry?

Milestones Ministry provides guidance for celebrating milestones within the church and within the lives of individuals and families. A simple five-part structure is suggested; these five stages give the event the opportunity to take deeper root in our on-going faith growth.

Name it:

- Identify meaningful and memorable moments in people’s lives
- Enable people to name the holy in life, recognize milestones along life’s journey, and take the time to be nurtured in their faith (both at home and in the parish community)
- *For example: An Aging Parent: caring for an aging parent is a major life-altering time which affects both the older person and her/his children (and grandchildren)*

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Equip it:

- Provide support, modeling, and resources to help people experience the milestone as an opportunity to continue to be aware of God's grace and constant presence in our lives
- Celebrate God's presence in the setting by providing Scripture and caring conversations about connecting faith to the milestone event
- *For example: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8; Deuteronomy 5:16; 1 Timothy 5: 4*
 - *Within a family setting: with as many family members as possible, share thoughts: How are you feeling? Do we have worries? What have been/are the blessings? What are our challenges?*
 - *Within the parish setting: Gather with other care-givers to share feelings, thoughts and resources*

Bless it:

- Offer a prayer to bless the lives of those involved in the milestone moment
- Offer a prayer during liturgy for those participating in the milestone moment
- *For example: Pray for the adult children (and grandchildren) who are caring for their aging parent. Encourage them to often bless their aging parent.*

Gift it:

- Give a visual reminder to help the milestone moment be recalled again and again
- Provide a gift as a visible sign that gives witness to one's faith
- *For example: A holding cross (<http://www.holdingcross.com/>), a prayer shawl, or a collage of pictures of the aging parent*

Reinforce it:

- Host a follow-up gathering of those involved in the milestone moment to help it gain deeper roots in the life of faith of those who participated
- *For example: Invite all those who have celebrated this milestone moment at home to a gathering at the parish to share their experiences, answer each other's questions, provide support, and talk about ways to stay connected for on-going support*

“Faith formation around milestones, sacramental celebrations, and life transitions provides an excellent way to promote the spiritual and faith growth of all ages and generations, enhance family faith practice at home, and strengthen people’s engagement in the church community or invite people to join or rejoin the church community.”

- Debbie Streicher,
Co-Director at Milestones Ministry

How?

The celebration of milestones (especially for adults) can occur with one's spouse; with family and/or relatives and friends; and/or within a parish setting. Various “already-designed” resources for milestones are available from [Adult Milestones | Milestones Ministry](#), such as becoming a parent, empty nest, retirement, loss of a loved one, etc.

Parishes can also design their own milestone moments, remembering that all “milestones” within our daily lives are touched by God. The remembering and celebrating of them, connecting them to God's touch, awakens us more and more to how close our God always is to us.

The designing of the celebration of milestones moments does not have to be done just by the parish staff. In fact, the designing of the celebration of the

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moments can be formative in itself – for all those involved. Why not call together a planning team – or a group of parishioners for a one-time gathering:

- Explain the celebration of milestone moments.
- Divide the group into small working groups, giving each group a Bible.
- Invite them to name a milestone moment and create the ritual/celebration around it by going through the five stages listed in this edition of **GEMS**.

I was recently part of a group that did just that. Here are a few of the many milestone moments that were created (most can be experienced in homes):

Name it: BLESSING FOR SPRING CLEANING (EASTER) AND/OR NEW YEAR (ADVENT)

Equip it: Psalm 127:2; Proverbs 24:3-4; Conversation: Share ideas of “home” and “house” and where we live into our faith.

Bless it: Blessing of the home, individual rooms, etc.

Gift it: Bottles of holy water

Reinforce it: Invite individuals and/or families to take pictures of their homes and bring in to the parish to show, discuss, share a story of how the blessing event went and/or how God is present in their home.



Name it: SPRING PLANTING

Equip it: Genesis 1:11-12; Luke 4:4-18; James 5:7; Conversation: share favorite things to plant and the struggles, joys and concerns of planting, especially new things.

Bless it: Bless the seeds.

Gift it: Seeds, a plant or garden gift

Reinforce it: Meet to go on a garden tour.



Name it: NEW JOB

Equip it: Genesis 2:15; Psalm 90:17; Jeremiah 29:11; Proverbs 16:3. Create a pilgrimage and take that route to work.

Bless it: Use prayer points and gratefulness reminders along the route.

Gift it: Something to keep as a reminder at their place of employment

Reinforce it: Quarterly/monthly meetings at the parish to encourage, celebrate new jobs, provide mentorship for anyone in transition



Name it: ENGAGEMENT

Equip it: Genesis 1:27-28; Tobit; Song of Songs; Mark 10:9; Matthew 19:4-6; Share ideas about the joys, blessings and challenges of married life.

Bless it: Blessing for the engaged couple – and all those who are/will continue to support them

Gift it: A faith symbol of the home (statue, tree, etc.)

Reinforce it: Gather with parents and other couples for wisdom/guidance in preparing for life together.



Name it: EMPTY NEST TRANSITION

Equip it: Proverbs 22:6; Proverbs 4:25-27; Psalm 127:3; Philippians 4:6-7; John 14:27; Conversation: What will be different? What are my memories, my worries, my joyful anticipations?

Bless it: Blessing for parents for the grace of letting go, the grace of new beginnings

Gift it: A journal

Reinforce it: Monthly gatherings at the parish with other empty-nesters (new ones and those who have survived it)



Name it: DIAGNOSIS OF CRITICAL ILLNESS/CANCER

Equip it: Psalm 41:3; James 5:14-16; John 11:4; Acts 28:8-9; Conversations: what are our fears and worries; where/when is our hope?

Bless it: Blessings at various points along the way (at each doctor visit, during chemo, etc.); pray with surgical staff

Gift it: Prayer shawl

Reinforce it: Pastoral calls from the parish staff and/or parishioners



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Name it: MOVING FROM A RENTED INSTRUMENT TO YOUR OWN INSTRUMENT OR PASSING DOWN AN INSTRUMENT FROM ONE GENERATION TO THE NEXT

Equip it: Psalm 150; Conversation about talents from God

Bless it: A blessing of the instrument, giving thanks to God for talents

Gift it: Medal of patron saint of music (Saint Cecilia)

Reinforce it: Twice a year, bring instruments to church to play before and after liturgy.



Name it: CLOSING OF AN IMPORTANT SITE (FACTORY, FAVORITE STORE, SCHOOL, CHURCH, ETC.)

Equip it: Psalm 32:8; Isaiah 43:18; Philippians 3:13-14; Philippians 4:8; Romans 8:28; Share stories and memories of the place; take a photo of the group and individuals in front of the building.

Bless it: Pray for all those affected by the closing.

Gift it: Bricks or pieces of the building

Reinforce it: Invite everyone to a gathering after a year to continue to tell stories and recall memories.



Name it: RETIREMENT

Equip it: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8; Gather as many family members as possible: and share ideas: how does each of us feel? What are we looking forward to?

Bless it: A blessing prayer for new beginnings

Gift it: A calendar

Reinforce it: Create a Facebook group where people share this in faith and in job during retirement years.



Name it: KISS-OFF CHEMO

Equip it: Luke 4:4; Luke 7:1-17; Matthew 9:35; Conversations: What were things like in the beginning? How do we feel now? What has been most difficult? What blessings did we experience?

Bless it: Have participants bless the survivor (with the sign of the cross on the forehead).

Gift it: An engraved bell (bells are used symbolically and rung when chemo is over)

Reinforce it: Service at a cancer clinic or participation in Relay for Life, etc.



Name it: ELDERS HAVING MOVED TO ASSISTED LIVING

Equip it: Matthew 28:20; Song: "Be Not Afraid; Conversations: who are your new friends? What belongings did you bring with you? What did you let go of?

Bless it: Blessing of the elder and/or blessing of their room

Gift it: "Next Chapter" bookmark

Reinforce it: Continual visits



Name it: GRIEVING

Equip it: Psalm 34:18; Joshua 1:9; Matthew 5:4; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4; Revelation 21:4; Conversations: Sharing of memories of deceased family member/friend

Bless it: Bless the grief out loud, feel it. Name the blessings received from this person and the ways you blessed her/him.

Gift it: A year calendar: on each month mark the death date.

Reinforce it: Each month on the death date, do something specific to remember: join with others to share memories; reach out to someone who is newly grieving, etc.



One parish's experience

Linda Buckley, Director of Faith Formation and RCIA Coordinator, St. Anne, Mother of Mary & Christ Our Light Parishes, Mexico, NY, relates their extensive milestones ministry process: "We are into our third year of using Milestones Ministry. We wrote a grant in order to start the program (from a grant foundation in the diocese of Syracuse).



I feel strongly that we need to share life's milestones with our parishioners: let them know that they are part of a larger whole; thus the Unity in Community idea of connecting church and home. They need to know that we recognize what's going on in their lives."

As Linda and her core planning group organized the kick-off for their Milestones Ministry, they had shirts, magnets, pens, and tote bags made with their logo.

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The parish introduced and began this endeavor in September 2015 (when Pope Francis visited the United States), situating it in a large parish event called “Welcome Day” on the front lawn under a tent.

For a copy of their **bulletin insert** which advertised the day and a **brochure** which invites people to indicate which milestones are of interest to them, go to AFF Helps at www.janetschaeffler.org.



Linda shares that one of their biggest successes has been a milestone celebrated at the parish on Grandparents day: the Grandparents Milestone:

Equipping it:

- Deuteronomy 4:9
- A list of quotes about grandparenting and the conversation questions can be found at AFF Helps on www.janetschaeffler.com
- Each grandparent was given a chest about the size of a jewelry box, invited to decorate it and to draw what they would put in it to remember their faith journey. They were then invited to reflect on: how will you use what you place in the chest to pass on faith to others? (For additional ideas about faith chests, see: <https://store.milestonesministry.org/product-p/fcmm.htm>.)

Blessing it: Blessing of the Faith Chests and blessing of the grandparents (see AFF Helps at www.janetschaeffler.com).

Giftng it:

- Grandparents Gifting Stone (<http://store.milestonesministry.org/product-p/ms-gp.htm>)
- Prayer Journals (This idea for grandparents came from [GEMS #65](#))
- Tea cups and saucers filled with candy kisses

- Magnifying grandparent bookmarks and matching magnetic picture frames

Reinforcing it: The grandparents and grandparents-to-be were invited to share ideas about:

- What are ways the faith community can help families with newborns?
- What are some ways you can help first-time grandparents?
- What action can you take to address these answers?

Some Resources:

- Milestones Ministry: <https://milestonesministry.org/>
- Faith Stepping Stones: <http://www.faithink.com/inkubators/stones.asp>
- For Everything a Season <http://store.milestonesministry.org/product-p/feas.htm>
- Blessing Bowl, Mat, and Stones for Congregational Milestones <https://store.milestonesministry.org/category-s/1827.htm>
- Milestones of Faith: <http://stickyfaith.org/articles/milestones-of-faith>
- *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers* (U.S. Catholic Bishops)
- *The Catholic Home: Celebrations and Traditions for Holidays, Feast Days, and Every Day* by Meredith Gould
- *To Bless the Space Between Us* by John O'Donahue
- *Psalms for Zero Gravity* by Edward Hays
- *The Circle of Life: The Heart's Journey Through the Seasons* by Joyce Rupp and Macrina Wiederkehr
- *Out of the Ordinary: Prayers, Poems, and Reflections for Every Season* by Joyce Rupp

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- *Prayers for the Domestic Church: A Handbook for Worship in the Home* by Edward Hays

GEMS Wonderings

- What are the milestones you celebrate within your parish setting? How might they be continued at home?
- How might you provide Milestones Ministry Packets for home use – for the everyday events of life?



Golden Nuggets from You

“In [GEMS #81](#) you included Jodi Picoult's book *Small Great Things*. I have 20 folks signed up to read and discuss it. Plus, another local reading group has invited the director of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center in Long Beach to come

to their discussion.

- Sr. Diane Morgan, OP; St. Ignatius Martyr Parish, Long Beach, NY



Adding New Luster to an Old Gem

In [GEMS #52](#) we explored praying with a labyrinth. These additional resources might be of help:

- Questions from a Labyrinth: <https://godspace-msa.com/2017/04/03/meditation-monday-questions-from-a-labyrinth/>
- Labyrinth Walking for All of Us: <https://godspace-msa.com/2017/04/04/labyrinth-walking-for-all-of-us/>

- Nature as a Living Labyrinth: <https://godspace-msa.com/2017/04/25/nature-as-a-living-labyrinth/>
- Walking The Labyrinth With The Psalms: <https://godspace-msa.com/2017/05/06/walking-the-labyrinth-with-the-psalms/>



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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 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>