



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

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A Best Practice: Lenten Soup & Bread

It's a reality that during the Lenten season parishes and dioceses provide many opportunities for this retreat-like season of the church year: opportunities for prayer, fasting, and almsgiving (the classic practices of Lent) – supported by ongoing formation.

Among the many offerings – in several places – are Soup & Bread evenings: a simple supper of soup and bread, coupled with prayer and/or formation.



The Lenten Soup & Bread gathering which is shared here has many elements in common with others that happen throughout our various countries, and perhaps some unique features, especially the timing and the audience.

The Timing

St. Fabian Parish in Farmington Hills, MI has offered Soup & Bread gatherings **during lunch** since 2003. They are scheduled for the Fridays of Lent from noon until about 1:00 pm. These early afternoons begin in church, and then move to the social hall for the soup and bread lunch.

The Audience

Because of the luncheon timing they are convenient for those **in businesses** which are located near the parish. Hence, Soup & Bread offers opportunities for Lenten growth for parishioners as well as other believers (who might not be parishioners) but are in the area during their workdays.

The Preparations for the Meal

The parishioners of St. Fabian make the events work:

- people sign up to bring soup or bread
- and to set-up, serve and clean-up

Time for Formation

The first 20-25 minutes feature a presentation flowing from the year's theme. A different speaker is invited for each of the six Fridays, providing the participants to hear various reflections.

The themes that have guided this Soup & Bread series of reflections over the years are listed here. (Notice that for some years the theme is linked to “current events” within the life of the church.)

- 2003: Forgiveness
- 2004: The Beatitudes
- 2005: Lent: Its History and Theology
- 2006: Were You There? - People of the Passion
- 2007: Breaking Open the Sunday Readings
- 2008: The Less Understood Parables
- 2009: The Year of St. Paul
- 2010: The Gospel of Luke
- 2011: The Gospel of Matthew
- 2012: The Sacraments
- 2013: Vatican II Documents (50th anniversary)
- 2014: St. Francis of Assisi
- 2015: The Traditional Prayers of the Church

Lent invites us to stop eating whatever protects us
from having to face the desert that is inside of us.

It invites us to feel our smallness,
to feel our vulnerability, to feel our fears,
and to open ourselves up to the chaos of the desert
so that we can finally give the angels
a chance to feed us.

That's the Christian ideal of Lent, to face one's chaos.

- Fr. Ron Rolbeiser

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The Almsgiving

The church reminds us always that fasting is a Gospel value, but not fasting by itself. Fasting and almsgiving are Gospel twins. Our tradition of fasting has never been simply to purge (to deprive the body for deprivation sake), but we fast to have more to give away. We fast in order to place ourselves in solidarity with the poor and hungry. If the money saved by our fasting does not somehow help feed the poor and hungry then our fasting is empty and useless.

Soup & Bread at St. Fabian lives this. Each Friday there is a free-will offering for the simple luncheon meal. That money is given – at the end of Lent – to a local soup kitchen.

In recent years we have become aware that fasting can be much broader than fasting from food:

Lent is a season that calls us:

to fast from discontent and to feast on gratitude;
to fast from anger and to feast on patience;
to fast from bitterness and to feast on forgiveness;
to fast from self-concern and to feast on compassion;

to fast from discouragement and to feast on hope;
to fast from laziness and to feast on commitment;
to fast from complaining and to feast on acceptance;
to fast from lust and to feast on respect;

to fast from prejudice and to feast on understanding;
to fast from resentment and to feast on reconciliation;
to fast from lies and to feast on the truth;
to fast from wasted time and to feast on honest work;

to fast from grimness and to feast on joy;
to fast from suspicion and to feast on trust;
to fast from idle talk and to feast on prayer and silence;
to fast from guilt and to feast on the mercy of God.

- Based on a version often attributed to Arthur Ward

Comments

Why has this opportunity continued each Lent for the last thirteen years? The comments from the participants tell the story:

- In such a short time, I learned so much about my faith.
- So interesting!
- Excellent speakers – and they each bring new perspectives; use different approaches and share their life experiences.
- What a fantastic timing – for my lunch hour, rather than adding something to the end of the day.
- These opportunities include so much: hospitality, time for learning and appreciating my faith, conversation over a simple lunch; a reminder of fasting and almsgiving.
- We should do this at other times – in addition to Lent.
- These short presentations/reflections have sparked an interest in me – to participate in further formation.

Some GEMS Wonderings

- What would be the **best timing** for your parish, for specific groups in your parish – a simple breakfast before work, or ...?
- What would be the **best time** for your parish? Could this practice be used during different seasons of the year? (gazpacho in the summer; prior to Thanksgiving, etc.)
- What if a vicariate/deanery/region **worked together** on an opportunity such as this – each month a different parish hosting a Soup & Bread and formation/discussion?
- What about the **location**? Rather than the parish, could short presentations/conversations be offered in area workplaces, in senior citizen residences; inviting small groups to gather in homes...?

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- What **themes-topics** would be helpful for the faith journey of your parishioners – and those in your geographical area?
- Might the participants bring a simple **bag lunch** rather than the soup and bread?
- Could a Peace and Justice Committee offer a Soup & Bread once a month with a short presentation on **an issue of the times**?
- How might an activity like this **involve more people** in your parish? E.g.: People who think they have nothing to give because they're "only" good cooks.

An Advent "spin-off" of this idea

Given the success of their Lenten Soup & Bread, last month (December 2015), Celia St. Charles, pastoral associate at St. Fabian, and the planning committee hosted Advent Mondays with a salad bar lunch and short reflections on Advent-Christmas people and happenings:

- The Infancy Narratives
- The Annunciation and Mary's Response
- The Many Names of Jesus (from Isaiah 9:1-6)
- The Message of St. John the Baptist



Golden Nuggets from You

"Sr. Rose Pacatte passed on to me a copy of [GEMS #38](#) - *Movies at the Parish*, that someone had sent to her. Congratulations on such a well written and rich sampler of ways that films can be used in parish discussion. There is a wide variation in their styles, as there should be.

I am interested for several reasons. I am engaged in a parish film program myself; I have long wondered how many other parishes are doing this; and I am active, along with Sr. Rose, in SIGNIS, the official international Catholic

media organization (www.signis.net), which is talking about cinema-spirituality on a world-wide scale. As a matter of fact, your Newsletter will provide valuable input for a panel I will be on at the SIGNIS World Congress in just a few weeks.

Our film discussion series at Holy Trinity Parish in Washington, DC, is called *Movie Moments of Grace*. In our third season we figure we have arrived at a sweet spot of screening six films a year. The series is under the aegis of the Ignatian Spirituality Committee of the parish, and the following paragraphs are always included in the handout we prepare for the film:

The conviction that underlies our Holy Trinity film discussion series is that active viewing of a film, followed by an honest exchange of views on its impact on us, can lead to a deeper appreciation of film as an art form that can illuminate the human condition, and lead us to meaningful spiritual insights. This is true of straightforward commercial movies, not just "religious" movies.

We believe that the best films deeply engage us as human beings at an affective level.

In the tradition Ignatian spirituality, reflection on that affective response can be a rich source of spiritual insight and growth.

The heart of any drama is the moral decisions that central characters face.

How we react to the responses of those characters can provide grist for helpful reflection on our own behavior and our desires to grow as integrated human beings.

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As you might guess from that statement of intent, we generally shy away from movies that are explicitly religious or Catholic, even high quality films like *Of Gods and Men*, because the message we want to convey is that there are spiritual riches to be gleaned from reflection on the stuff of everyday life and culture.

Our approach is to use film not as a teaching tool but as an occasion for spiritual self-discovery, based on the (Teilhardian) conviction that nothing on earth is profane, and that indeed we need to engage our culture to discover the human/divine that is uplifting and helps build the kingdom of God. And as we become critical consumers of culture (in this case through discussion of popular films) we help raise it up.

The films of our 2013-2014 season (September to May) were

- *The Apostle*
- *The Station Agent*
- *Two for the Road*
- *A Separation*
- *Smoke Signals*
- *Mostly Martha* (German version)

I notice now that we did not have an American blockbuster that season as we have had in the past when we screened *Gran Torino* with Clint Eastwood, and *Michael Clayton* with George Clooney.

We have the advantage of a large parish that draws members also from outside its geographical boundaries, and we average between 50-80 people who stay for discussion.

- We screen on Saturday nights at 6:30, adjourn to wine and cheese refreshments and gather in four or five groups for discussion.
- Our facilitators all follow the same approach, which emphasizes universal participation and listening.
- This is not a teaching moment; it is a discovery moment, in community.

- Discussion runs 45 minutes to an hour, depending on how long the movie is.

As Catholics involved in media production I have joined with Sr. Rose and a number of others to found the SIGNIS Catholic Communicators Forum. A principal focus of several founding members of SCCF is film criticism and education, and we offer the prospect of helping people who are engaged in a full range of film discussion groups to network with each other. Your **GEMS** article was an eye opener, and we are delighted to know that there are so many parishes so engaged.”

- Frank Frost,

an independent documentary television producer: Frank Frost Productions



Janet Schaeffler, OP

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

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

- *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.seasonsofadultfaith.com/>
- *40 Tips: Getting Started in Adult Faith Formation*
[http://www.ecatechist.com/ebooks/\(scroll down\)](http://www.ecatechist.com/ebooks/(scroll%20down))
- *Parish Leadership for Improved Adult Catechesis*
<http://store.pastoralplanning.com/iboplbeprfor.html>