



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

#66 - June 2016

Best Practices: Support for Grandparents (Part III)

For the last two months we've looked at various ways that parishes and (arch)dioceses are supporting today's grandparents.

- [GEMS #64](#) looked at the practice of a grandparent-grandchild camp; grandparents in prayer; and grandparents at a distance.
- [GEMS #65](#) explored grandparents raising grandchildren as well as grandparents passing on the faith to their grandchildren.

In the research for her dissertation on the spiritual development of children, Holly Catterton Allen recounts children's responses about a spiritual experience while with their grandparents:

- the grandparent mentions God in birthday cards
- the grandparent practices a daily quiet time with God
 - the grandparent is loving like God is
- the grandparent shows faith in God in times of stress such as natural disasters
 - the grandparent brings gifts”

- *“The Spiritual Influence of Grandparents”*
in *Christian Education Journal*, Fall 2008

This issue will explore several endeavors and resources that have been tried and/or are available to support grandparents in all their roles and privileges today.



Our culture celebrates National Grandparents Day on the first Sunday after Labor Day. While ministering in the diocese of Burlington, VT, Sister Martha Pavelsky, MSHS encouraged parishes to celebrate and bless grandparents during the liturgies

on the weekend nearest the feast of SS. Anne and Joachim, grandparents of Jesus (July 26).



Mary George, Director of Evangelization Ministry at St. Rita of Cascia Parish, Aurora, IL, remarks that many grandparents are supporting unmarried adult children who are pregnant or have a child or they are parenting the grandchild themselves. When the parish identified these needs, they provided a support group for the grandparents called G.R.A.P.E.S. (Grandparents Receiving and Providing Encouragement and Support). The group met monthly to share struggles and stories. The parish also provided information about educational opportunities for their single parent child, brought in speakers to talk about how to file income tax, local services available for the child and the grandchild, etc.



Some parishes have provided one-time events for grandparents:

Mary Campion, Director of Lifelong Faith Formation at St. Agatha Parish, Milton, Massachusetts, relates: “The Grandparenting program started on a light note with having people share what their grandchildren call them. I wrote it all down on a poster when we got back to the large group and we displayed that poster.”

Mary continued to describe the program:

- Then the pairs shared what they do to pass on the faith to their grandchildren.
- A video segment on how to talk about the faith from National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry called "Live Catholic: Practical Ways to Build Strong Catholic Families" was viewed.
- The group explored the power of stories: how grandchildren love to hear stories about mom and dad when they were little (and how these stories often include faith experiences).

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- Various handouts, including Advent calendars, to use with grandchildren were distributed.
- The closing prayer incorporated the patron saints of grandparents.

Suzanne Nelson, Adult Faith Formation Coordinator, St. Raphael, Rockville MD, shared that their Living Catholic Evangelization Team decided to hold monthly forums on topics which were connected with faith life challenges.

One of them was Grandparent's Night. The evening was planned to explore some of these questions:

- Can you share a grandparent faith-sharing success story?
- Do you have questions about your role as a grandparent?
- What are some ways the parish can help you to share faith with your grandchildren?

“Grandparents are a family’s greatest treasure,
the founders of a loving legacy,
the greatest storytellers,
the keepers of traditions that linger on
in cherished memory.
Grandparents are the family’s strong foundation.
Their very special love sets them apart.
Through happiness and sorrow,
through their special love and caring,
grandparents keep a family close at heart.

- *Author unknown*



In the archdiocese of Brisbane, Australia, several parishes host a program that was created by Gail Godfrey in 2010 as part

of her work with the John Paul II Centre for Family and Life: Aria Angels (<http://www.bne.catholic.net.au/asp/index.asp?pgid=12157>).

Aria Angels is a joyful, interactive and developmental experience for children from birth to five years of age with parents, grandparents, and friends. The format of the 90-minute sessions includes music, art, morning tea and prayer. The prayer space uses different colors throughout the year for the various seasons of the liturgical year.

Simple, age-appropriate themes loosely connect the four components of the session without restricting activities. An example of the themes are: animals, water, space, transport, colours, food, toys, sharing, opposites, working, holidays, doors, shapes, candles, Easter, Christmas, Gospel messages, etc.

Aria Angels aims to celebrate the small pleasures, nurture holistic development, imagine the possibilities and create meaningful relationships. The child’s first teachers are parents and, in many cases, grandparents; the early years of life bring rapid growth physically, verbally and emotionally. During this time families establish relationships that often define them for life.

In addition to the activities during the session, parents/grandparents and children together are encouraged to create a journal in the form of a scrapbook which is a living gift between adult and child and can be a point of discussion between sessions. At the close of each session children receive a handout with a song or rhyme and prayer to paste in their journals.

Some comments from participating grandparents include:

- I first read about Aria Angels as I was embarking on the wonderful opportunity to care for my 6 month old grandson once a week. My grandson, Lachlan, was 9 months old when we started to attend and clearly from the first day he was captivated. I have a very grateful heart to Aria Angels as it is most certainly providing Lachlan with a valuable grounding for learning and for me, well, it just touches my soul. (Maree)
- Aria Angels is a very special time for me to spend with my granddaughter in a very caring, learning environment. I love the fact that it involves a moment of quiet reflection and prayer. Sometimes our

lives are so busy that we forget to take those moments to remember what really is important. (Trudy)

- It would have been good to have programmes like this when our own children were young. a number of things appealed to me:
 - The welcoming and sociable environment
 - The skills and techniques which we can attempt to apply at home as reinforcement
 - The variety of activities, which would hopefully not be too difficult to replicate at home
 - The overall feeling of simplicity and evennessAll I can really say is "Thank You." (Richard)



CFM (Christian Family Movement) has a six-week program: The Grand Adventure: A New Call to Grandparenting written by Deacon Gary and Kay Aitchison, past Executive Directors and current International CFM Presidents.

The Grand Adventure was created in response to an observed need in today's society to make better use of the grandparenting connection in family life. The program was inspired by and modeled from the many dynamic and committed grandparents who share their time, talent, gifts and charisms with their grandchildren.

- See the Table of Contents: <http://www.cfm.org/tocgrandadv.html>
- Try Chapter One: <http://www.cfm.org/grandadv.pdf>
- To receive chapters 2-6, contact <http://cfm.org/contact.html>

“Always when you meet your grandparents you find a surprise. They are patient, they know how to listen ... don't forget grandparents, understand?”

- Pope Francis



The Death of a Grandchild

One of the most devastating experiences in life is the death of a child. That grief is uniquely felt by grandparents; it has been said that grandparents experience two griefs: the death of their grandchild and watching the sorrow/grief of their own child, knowing they can't take it away.

- Grandparent Grief: <http://www.healingheart.net/grandparents.html>
- The Grief of Grandparents: http://www.compassionatefriends.org/brochures/the_grief_of_grandparents.aspx
- The Grief of Grandparents: <http://connect.legacy.com/inspire/page/show?id=1984035%3APage%3A7612>
- The Grief of Grandparents: <http://americanhospice.org/working-through-grief/the-grief-of-grandparents/>
- Helping a Grandparent who is Grieving: http://griefwords.com/index.cgi?action=page&page=articles%2Fhelping16.html&site_id=8
- Grieving Grandparents: <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/grievinggrandparents/info>
- The Forgotten Mourners: <http://www.aarp.org/home-family/friends-family/info-12-2013/grandparents-bereaved-death-loss.html>
- Grandchild Loss Resources: <http://www.bandbacktogether.com/grandchild-loss-resources/>
- Grief Support for Grandparents: http://www.compassionatefriends.org/Find_Support/Family-Support/grief_support_for_grandparents.aspx

“Grandparents make the world...a little softer, a little kinder, a little warmer.”

- *author unknown*

Some GEMS Suggestions

- Schools have Grandparents Days; what about faith formation programs?
- Look at your parish and catechetical registration forms. Are they inclusive of all types of families, all types of caregivers? How can you be sensitive to grandparents who are raising grandchildren?



Golden Nuggets from You

“What a wonderful progression of opportunities covering the same topic ([GEMS #51](#)). Too often I think we get into a topic with an initial offering and then drop it without further study or formation with our people. We surely do them a disservice when formation is not ongoing!

- *Diane Seidel, St. Boniface Parish, Bay City, Michigan*

“Thanks, Sister Janet. It’s a good, comprehensive, and practical check list ([GEMS #47](#)).

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



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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:

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