



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

102 – June 2019

A Best Practice: Faith Story-Telling

As we walk this faith journey ourselves – and with others in ministry, especially in the ministry of faith formation - we are convinced of many realities:

- Our faith journey is not an isolated journey; we are influenced by, supported by, encouraged by others. This is especially true within the family.
- As ministers (no matter which age group we minister to), we know that our ministry is not just to those individuals. Our ministry – and all that we do – affects the entire family.
- Family life is the preeminent place where we experience God, where our faith life grows and develops.

Given these realities (and many others), parish leaders are realizing and designing new ways to incorporate parents (and other adults) in the catechetical programs and processes for children and youth.

For many, intergenerational programs are succeeding and making a difference in the lives of all ages.

In other instances, leaders have found ways to intentionally integrate parents (and other adults) within the usual structure of sessions originally designed for children and/or youth.

One example

David Dayler, Director, Discipleship & Parish Life Office, and Anne Jamieson, Director, Catechesis Office, Diocese of Hamilton, Ontario, CA, recount their challenge and desire to provide a better way:

“For years our process for our Confirmation candidates was a ‘drop off - go to class’ program that was really not very successful.

- Did it meet the requirements? Yes.
- Was there any real sense of formation or transformation? Hard to say but we would hedge toward no!

We needed a change.

When we started to actively work towards a much stronger focus on adult faith formation, knowing that our children's formation would improve as a result of that, we decided to refocus our Confirmation program and invite (require) that either a parent, a grandparent or a caregiver needed to be present for the first ten minutes of the five catechetical sessions of the program as well as the ending ten minutes. We reshaped the program to include much more interactive opportunities for this inter-generational approach. We expected push-back at first but received none!”

The Focus of the New Approach

The entire process was built on sharing stories - family stories and stories of faith. This addition – of the mixing of the generations and the sharing of stories - helped to move the previous "information" sessions to "formation" sessions and eventually to "transformation.”

Storytelling comes naturally to humans,
but since we live in an unnatural world,
we sometimes need a little help doing
what we'd naturally do.

- Dan Harmon

Response of Parents

David and Anne mentioned that they expected push-back from the parents but didn't receive any! When asked why that might not have happened, David said, “I think there was no push-back because once the parents realized that it was a no threat situation - not meant to test or challenge them – but instead to allow them enter into the conversation through story - they were only too happy to share.”

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Stories ... are like prayers.
It does not matter when you begin, or when you end,
only that you bend a knee and say the words.

- Dan Harmon

The Format of the Sessions

First Ten Minutes: The session is opened with parents/caregivers and young people which includes:

- Opening prayer
- Organizing information
- “Tell me a story”

Twenty minutes: Build on What We Know. This group discussion flows from “Tell me a story” and moves toward the main content of the session.

Thirty minutes: This teaching section of the session includes:

- Proclaiming Scripture
- Reviewing Faith Facts
- Making connections to the sacrament of Confirmation

Last Ten Minutes: Parents/caregivers return for this time when:

- The catechists share the “big idea” for the day
- Set up Face2Face Talk Tags and the Tech Tags for the coming week
- The families are sent off to talk on the way home, later that day, at a mealtime, or the best time for each family to capture five-seven minutes together for a conversation

Stories make us more alive, more human,
more courageous, more loving.

- Madeleine L'Engle

Tell Me a Story

Some of the suggested story-telling activities included:

- Have your parent or caregiver tell you a story about your Baptism, or about your First Communion or theirs. It may be something special or something funny that happened at the church or in preparation for the sacrament, or at the celebration afterwards.
- Ask your parent or caregiver to tell you their favorite story about Jesus. Why do they like that story?
- Have your parent or caregiver tell you how they know what's right and wrong. Who taught them?
- Every parent wants their child to grow up to live a good life. Ask your parent or caregiver what their hopes are for you in the future.
- Have your parent or caregiver tell you what they are most looking forward to about your Confirmation.

People think stories are shaped by people.
In fact, it's the other way around.

- Terry Pratchett

Face2Face Talk Tags and Tech Tags

The program materials include six sturdy tags – found inside the back cover of the candidate's book - that can be attached to a zipper on a coat or a backpack using the provided carabiner (a metal loop with a spring-loaded gate that is used to quickly and reversibly connect components).



The Talk Tags are double-sided. One side has the Face2Face conversation starter for candidates and parents to share together. The other side has the TechTalk for those who wish to extend their experience by going online.

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Some examples of Talk Tags:

- Think of two ways you can work on what Baptism calls “training in the faith.”
- How can you better live your lives as disciples of Christ?
- What did you learn about Confirmation at this session that was new to you?
- How will you continue your faith journey with Christ after your Confirmation?

Some examples of Tech Talks:

- Go to www.BustedHalo.com/category/sacraments101 and watch any of the videos on the sacraments.
- Text or **f** your godparents to thank them for being there at your baptism.
- **t** @Pontifex to give a positive message of encouragement to other followers of Jesus.
- Watch a video of “The Father’s Love Letter” at www.fathersloveletter.com.
- Google images of “Catholic Confirmation.” What do the symbols and pictures make you think of?

Telling stories is not just a way of passing time.
It is the way the wisdom gets passed along.
The stuff that helps us to live a life worth remembering.

- Rachel Naomi Remen

The Flexibility of the Program

Adult Companion: Even though the ideal would be to have the parent(s) always present with their Confirmation candidate, the invitation is always broad and inclusive. If the parent(s) isn’t able to be present, grandparents, older siblings, other relatives and adults who are significant in the life of the child are invited and encouraged to accompany them.

Age of the candidates: The age for the celebration of Confirmation in the diocese of Hamilton is seventh grade. In situations where Confirmation is celebrated at a younger age, often the parents have wanted to and been welcomed to stay for the entire session. Many times the parents have participated in the discussions throughout the session which illustrates for the children that everyone is learning together; no one is ever finished learning and growing in faith.

The human species thinks in metaphors
and learns through stories.

- Mary Catherine Bateson

What Parents and Caregivers Have Said

- “The conversation continued around the dinner table.”
- “We enjoyed sharing the Tech Talk moments with our other children as well.”
- “I wish we had had this when our other children were preparing for Confirmation; their preparation was more like going to school!”
- “This was a wonderful refresher opportunity for myself.”
- “We appreciated the structure because it gave us a place to start and an opportunity to engage. Often we never knew – or are afraid to – participate because we didn’t think we “knew” enough.

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What Catechists and Parish Staff Members Have Said

- "We were amazed at how willing the parents were to share."
- "For a couple of the sessions the parents stayed right through."
- "We have seen more people coming to Sunday liturgy as families, not only in preparation for the sacrament but following the celebration of Confirmation."

It has been said that next to hunger and thirst,
our most basic human need is for storytelling.
- Khalil Gibran

For More Information: <https://en.novalis.ca/pages/gifted-by-god>

Some Resources about Storytelling in the Faith Context

- Faith Storytelling Toolkit:
http://www.faithaliveresources.org/Content/Site135/FilesSamples/305205810702pdf_00000024712.pdf
- Stories that Bind Us:
<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/17/fashion/the-family-stories-that-bind-us-this-life.html?pagewanted=all&r=3>
- Why Telling our Stories Matters:
<https://chuckdegroat.net/2012/10/03/why-telling-our-stories-matters-leaving-egypt-bonus-track/>
- Church-Wide Question of the Month:
<https://www.crcna.org/FaithFormation/toolkits/faith-storytelling-toolkit/church-wide-question-month>

- Telling our Faith Story:
<http://www.buildfaith.org/telling-our-faith-story/>
- What is Your Faith Story?
<http://www.centredaily.com/living/liv-columns-blogs/article126960454.html>
- Sharing Faith Dinners:
<http://www.sharingfaithdinners.com/#testimonials>
- Faith Sharing is Essential to Faith:
http://www.todaysparish.com/articles/evangelization/no_sub_ministry/2010/10-20/faith-sharing-is-essential-to-faith

Some Wondering GEMS

As you think about some of the principles and practices that are foundational to this Confirmation program, what might give you some ideas about other adult faith formation programs and processes, for instance:

- When and how do you use story-telling within adult faith formation offerings?
- How is story-telling being used in your programs/processes for
 - RCIA sponsor formation
 - RCIA reflection sessions
 - Intergenerational faith formation settings
- How might you invite continuing learning for your adults by connecting them with resources on the internet?
- Do your lector training endeavors include an exploration of their role of proclaiming Scripture as story?

We tell ourselves stories in order to live.

— Joan Didion



Adding New Luster to an Older Gem

[GEMS #54](#) explored how the current phenomena of “Little Free Libraries” and mobile libraries can spark ideas for us in adult faith formation.

You might want to peruse these additional articles for more ideas and suggestions:

- Preference of Printed Books: <http://www.nbcnews.com/tech/tech-news/92-percent-students-prefer-paper-books-over-e-books-survey-n511371>
- Why Libraries Matter More Than Ever: <http://www.alternet.org/books/why-libraries-are-even-more-vital-they-were-digital-age?sc=fb>
- Websites for Those Who Think about Books All the Time: <https://www.bustle.com/articles/151588-9-websites-for-readers-who-think-about-books-all-day-every-day>
- The Most Bookish Places on Earth: <https://www.bookbub.com/blog/most-bookish-places-on-earth>
- The Parish that Reads Together: <https://www.buildfaith.org/the-congregation-that-reads-together/#gref>
- Reading Together: <https://www.uua.org/books/read>
- From Free Libraries to Free Food Pantries: <https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2017/01/11/508931473/a-new-type-of-food-pantry-is-sprouting-in-yards-across-america?utm?utm>
- Books Can Solace, Empower and Transform Us: <http://www.dailygood.org/story/2179/how-books-solace-empower-and-transform-us-maria-popova/>

- Why Libraries are Necessary: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/oct/15/neil-gaiman-future-libraries-reading-daydreaming?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other
- All about the Little Free Library Movement: <https://littlefreelibrary.org/>



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

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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 and <http://www.lifelongfaith.com/2015-adult-faith-formation-symposium.html>