



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

#108 - January 2020

A Best Practice: Concrete Reminders

Many adult faith formation coordinators and parish catechetical leaders have realized that people:

- appreciate having tangible items to remind them to pray
- are grateful to know that their church is a source of support
- desire reminders that God is with them wherever they are

Isn't it interesting that so many people participate in Ash Wednesday services and Palm Sunday liturgies? Does the receiving of these tactile blessings or items remind us that we are a faith of tangible signs? We see, hear, and touch the mysteries of our faith; these tangible signs assist people in integrating a Catholic identity into their lives.

Within faith formation settings, we take advantage of the power of seeing, hearing, and touching. What about after the sessions?

- In planning faith formation curriculum, often times, there are take-home materials so that parents will know what the child(ren) explored during a session. Many catechetical leaders have witnessed that three dimensional items were better received in families than newsletters or paper explanations.
- Adults in adult faith formation opportunities and the RCIA process also respond enthusiastically to reminders to take into their lives.



This **GEMS** issue explores one way of connecting faith and life, connecting faith formation opportunities with everyday home life through tangible items, through Live It Kits.

We hear about this endeavor from Roberta Balsewicz, Director of Faith Formation, Holy Spirit Catholic Community, Naperville, IL. Roberta shares with us her experiences at several parishes.

The Planting of the Seeds

Roberta reminisces: "During the mid-90's, sacramental parent meetings morphed into parent and child retreats. At these retreats, there was often a lot of talking. We had a team in Religious Education and we collaborated and came up with more experiential parent and child retreats. The retreats had many different models over the years. We experimented with parents and children starting out together, separating for some activities, or keeping together for the entire time. We observed that parents and children enjoyed having something to take home to do something with. Parents and catechists mentioned that children who received something, such as a medal of a sheep or a cross, were spotted in their public schools and after school activities wearing them and talking about them.

Seasonal family events were then designed to bring families to the church for a community and prayer experience during Advent and Lent. During these experiences, families created items to take home which encouraged prayer or action in the home related to the season. Some examples of these items were:

- Lenten deserts where rocks were added as prayers were prayed or works of mercy lived
- Advent Angels were made and prayers provided as well as a little angel pin which was left behind at the site of a good deed
- Advent wreaths
- Lenten wreaths
- Advent Porch Candle
- Advent Calendars

These tangible items which went into the homes asked families to pray with their creations throughout the season. Many stories were told as to how this enlivened the faith of the families.



I was a Coordinator of Religious Education along with Jane Ehrlich, the Director of Children's Ministry and several other staff people who attended *Generations of Faith* training and went onto receive *National Mentor Training*. There was great excitement around creating what we named 'Take Home' kits

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which went home with families four times a year. We named our events 'Wings' - Weaving in God's Story."

A Live It Kit for the Triduum

Roberta shares: "One of the most exciting WINGS events we held was an event centered on the Triduum. At the end of the evening, each household went home with a "Live It" kit: printed materials and items for a prayer space at home wrapped in a white hand towel tied with straw and displaying a shaft of wheat and grapes. This created quite the buzz among families. The prayer space began with using the towel as the prayer cloth and placing the other items on it to remind them of the three Triduum days. The Holy Thursday liturgy had a huge increase in participation from that year on. People had learned the importance of the Triduum."

Reverse Collection

Twice a year the parish has done a "Reverse Collection" at Mass. At the presentation of gifts, the pastor talked about giving the parish the gift of focus for Lent: masonry nails with a prayer card were in the collection baskets and the community was invited to take them to carry and pray for Lent. The normal collection was taken through baskets at the doors to the Church on the way out.

The second time, an invitation to a learning event was created on a label and put on a wooden disk which was passed during the presentation of gifts. Both times the community was quite excited; people thanked the pastor for his gift.

The Red Bag Project

Roberta tells us how the idea grew: "The Religious Education staff spoke at length about the success of putting 'stuff' into people's homes. It was then decided to create grade level bags of materials to be rotated in and out of the families in the religious education program. Jane Ehrlich, the director of religious education, began "The Red Bag Project."

The bags contained written materials for families with children based upon the focus for the year along



with videos, tangible items, statues, etc. This provided home learning kits for families. A journal was included which provided and encouraged parents to take a picture of the family using the materials and to record their experience of using the Red Bag. The journal entries were filled with moments which demonstrate the effectiveness of parents being the catechists of their own children. The stories were quite heart-warming as to how families were impacted by praying and learning together and how their faith lives were enriched."

Another Parish's Experience

When Roberta moved to another parish as Director of Religious Education for all ages, she comments that "This community was excited to adopt the Generations of Faith model as a supplement to religious education. It was a smaller parish and the community was quite different. There were as many households without children who attended these events as households with children.



Households were enthusiastic about bringing some form of kits into their homes. The adults were motivated to be involved and helped to design and implement what I labeled the 'Live It' kits. These kits had something in them for children as well as teens and adults. The kits encouraged participants to use what applied to them and to share the rest of their kit with their neighbors, friends and extended family. People shared the stories of how they offered materials they didn't use to others and how that brought others to renew their faith. It brought life and an adult education ministry into a parish which had lost all of that initiative."

Prayer Live It Kits

Roberta relates how she designed grade level 'Please Pray with Me' boxes: "Each week at Religious Education, children were allowed to check out a 'Please Pray with Me' box.

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The families responded well. Parents were walking into the building with the kits and their children, to say thank you. Parents were very conscientious and if their child was ill, they still brought the kit back. No one wanted to miss their turn or to make someone else miss.

One example was the box to aid in learning the Hail Mary. In the box was a cardboard copy of the prayer, a small plush Mary with a letter from her, a rosary, and a pamphlet on how to pray the Rosary.”



For more ideas for take home prayer ideas, check:

<http://flamecreativekids.blogspot.co.uk/2013/04/family-prayer-bag-for-3-7s.html>

A Beginning of the Year Kit

Following the opening prayer service for the beginning of the catechetical year, a sacramental or prayer idea was sent home, such as

- a blessing of the backpacks
- items for a home altar
- a crucifix (or a cookie cutter of a cross)

A Christmas Live It Kit

Each year a different ornament related to a blessing or learning was attached to a small card with an explanation so that each year when they hung the ornament on their tree, they could revisit what was learned.

These learnings or blessings were presented simply such as

- a blessing of the nativity scene
- a blessing before opening gifts
- a star for the top of the tree
- a blessing of the tree
- the story of the poinsettia

The Experience at a Third Parish

Roberta mentions that at another parish where she ministered as a religious education consultant and then Religious Education Coordinator, she implemented placing items into homes in ways which were seamless with their programs.

Because they had an existing At Home program which included three gatherings a year, a tangible item related to the theme was added. One of the events was the making of a nativity scene. The families were then invited to participate in Bambinelli Sunday with their baby Jesus for a special blessing during the liturgy.

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The Current Experience at Holy Spirit Catholic Community

Jane Ehrlich and Roberta Balsewicz had worked together for fifteen years, then apart for ten years, and are now ministering together again; Roberta is Director of Faith Formation (adults), Jane is the Director of Religious Education (children). After much conversation and the implementation of family events within the religious education program, Roberta applied for a grant from The Catholic Education Fund to put sacramentals into the hands of the parish to foster Catholic Identity.

The Baptismal Program

Roberta and the pastor redesigned the baptismal preparation program. One part of the program now includes the parents taking home a 'Feed Them the Faith' kit. The kit – in a party bag - includes:

- a laminated placement for the dining room table (one side has Grace before Meals; the other side has suggestions on how to share faith with children)
- baby food
- a book of Catholic Prayers and Practices

The bag is tied with a rubber tipped spoon on it. The spoon is engraved with "Feed Them the Faith, Holy Spirit Catholic Community."



Marriage Preparation



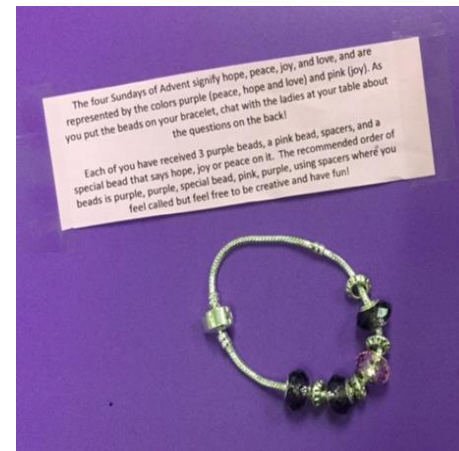
The marriage preparation process ends with presenting a plate with "Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread." The engaged (soon-to-be-married) couples are encouraged to use it at daily meals.

Retreat Experiences

- A Veronica and Simon retreat is offered for adults during which part of the prayer experience was a small cloth stamped with a cross (the

veil and the cross). Participants were encouraged to use it as a meditation help during their prayer at home.

- Two women's retreats – Advent by Candlelight and Spa for the Soul – are offered; each of these events has tangible sacramentals which go home to help people remember to pray. One year silicone phone pockets were created as the theme for the retreat was "Marvelously Called." The pockets are attached to cell phones and normally carry a driver's license and credit card; also included were cards with scripture verses. In other years, gratitude jars and Advent bracelets were made.



Reconciliation Retreat

The children's Reconciliation retreat has the children decorating a pillowcase which already has the Act of Contrition ironed on it.

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Home Blessings

An article runs in the Sunday bulletin once a year explaining whys and ways of blessing each other in the home. Bottles of holy water are available to parishioners.

Blessings of the Backpacks

At the beginning of the year, the children are invited to bring their backpacks to Mass during which they are called forward to be blessed and given a clip with a blessing for their backpacks.

Car Chats

Small packets of “Car Chat” were developed which provide questions for families to talk about on the way home from church (or anytime). They were designed to attach to visors.

- <https://www.loyolapress.com/faith-formation/religion-readiness/called-to-be-catholic/parents-and-students/conversation-starters-and-faith-tips>
- <http://archden.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/FamilyPrayer.pdf>
- <https://www.catholiceducation.org/en/marriage-and-family/parenting/conversation-starters-promoting-family-communication.html>
- <https://thefamilydinnerproject.org/conversation/conversation-starters/>
- <http://www.ahaparenting.com/parenting-tools/communication/family-discussions>



GEMS Suggestions

- Now that you've read this issue with its multiple creative ideas for taking faith home, what ideas are simmering for you?
- In your adult faith formation efforts, is there something for the participants to take home as a reminder, an incentive, a continuing-learning opportunity?
- Are there ways everyone could take something home following liturgy – a reminder of the Gospel's message?
- How might you find people to help make this happen (your crafty Pinterest people)?



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