



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

117- July 21, 2020

Some Principles and Practices for These Times (Part I)

There are many guidelines and principles that focus our efforts in adult faith formation. Some are constant; others surface when we find ourselves in unprecedented times and unique circumstances.

Let's explore some of them, accompanied by some real-life practices (in purple font) adopted by parishes today which concretely and sensitively live them.

1- Everything is formative; adult faith formation is happening all the time. Everything we do teaches.

This, of course, is nothing new. As the late religious educator Maria Harris wrote in her book *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church*, "the church doesn't have an educational program; it is an educational program. ... The parish is the curriculum for faith formation."

In *Our Hearts Were Burning within Us*, the US bishops likewise stressed that "The parish is the curriculum" (#118). Everything that we do teaches! It's not just a question of creating new programs, but of looking at everything we do and asking: what/how are we teaching in that practice, guideline, program or activity?

For instance, in these times, how are we responding? If the pastor and pastoral staff are calling parishioners to check in, if a group of parish leaders are calling parishioners to see if they need help, what are the people learning about church, about their value?

At St. Mark Parish in Indianapolis, the twelve members of the Steering Committee of their Ministry for Maturing Adults, divided the list of parishioners 75 years of age and older among themselves and call them each week. They inquire how the person is doing, inquire if they have any needs, and offer to pray with the person. If a need is uncovered (groceries, prescription, etc.), the coordinator contacts one of the people who have volunteered for MMA so that they can run the errand.

Everything we do teaches is also illustrated in what our parish websites look like at this time. What is the first thing people see? Is it a message that says

"We're Closed?" Or do they immediately see the ways they can connect with the parish, the (arch)diocese, the church during this time? Do they easily find links for prayer helps, to inspirational articles regarding this time?

The website of St. Boston Parish in Boston makes the week's online opportunities very explicit and easy to find.

ONLINE THIS WEEK

MONDAY 29
• 6:30 PM - Evening Prayer

TUESDAY 30

WEDNESDAY 1
• 9 AM - Morning Gospel Fellowship

THURSDAY 2
• 9 AM - Morning Gospel Fellowship
• 7:30 PM - Gospel Now: Reflecting on Racism, Justice & Love

FRIDAY 3
• 9 AM - Morning Gospel Fellowship

SATURDAY 4

SUNDAY 5
• 10 AM - Mass Livestream

HOW TO CONNECT

- Morning Gospel Fellowship is offered over Zoom
- RSVP with Scott MacDonald (smacdonaldstceciilaboston.org)
- All else can be found on Facebook (facebook.com/saintceciilaboston)
- For Mass Livestream (and more!), visit our homepage: stceciilaboston.org

JUNE 29 - JULY 5

As soon as parishioners log onto the website of St. Paul Parish in Cambridge, MA, they are reminded of how to connect with the parish via YouTube and Facebook.

Everything that we do sends a message; everything that we do teaches.

SOCIAL MEDIA OUTREACH

STAY CONNECTED! SUBSCRIBE, LIKE, & FOLLOW @ST.PAUL'S HARVARD SQUARE ON YOUTUBE AND FACEBOOK

Sunday and Daily Mass at 11:00 am - YouTube Livestream from St. Paul's in Harvard Square

"Totus Tuesday" Every Tuesday at 8:30 pm - Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, Rosary, and Litany of the Sacred Heart

#StPaulSaturdays - Each Saturday, share memories, photos, and reflections on our Facebook page!

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2- Remember our why.

In the last several months, just about everything has changed. Yet, one thing hasn't: our purpose and goal. The purpose of adult faith formation, of all parish and (arch)diocesan ministry is to nurture disciples who connect faith and their everyday life, empower disciples who make a difference in today's world.

In these days, then, as we plan for a "new normal," we need to remember and be deeply embedded in our mission and in Gospel values.

As a planning team, you might want to watch the short TED talk: [Start with why -- how great leaders inspire action.](#)

3- In all times, we're called to offer three types of programming:

- Gathered (at the parish, retreat centers, "third places")
- Online
- Blended (gathered and online)

Even though researchers and ministerial leaders have encouraged this approach for years, these times have graphically illustrated the necessity and the reality. Now, more than ever, we realize the need as well as the advantages of being present through communications technology.



4- Online experiences are here to stay.

When we return to whatever will be our normal, we will have a whole culture who is more aware of and dependent on the Internet than they were

before the pandemic. How will this impact the way we engage our parish and one another on the faith journey? We should not expect our folks to walk away from communication technologies that have become indispensable to them.

When St. Juliana Parish in Chicago began to reopen (as many parishes throughout most countries), their website continues to show also the many online opportunities that remain available.

Stephanie Holden from St. Ann Parish, Marietta, GA reflects, "Most people, of all ages, have taken to Zoom and find it quite easy to use. Some of my bible studies actually prefer it. What I've found is that virtual meetings enable people to establish trust earlier and they share more deeply. I've spoken with several facilitators who have said the same. I've been really surprised by this and am planning some of my future classes via Zoom now."

5- As always, involve parishioners and people from the community who have the gifts needed for what the times call us to.

The experience that Roberta Balsewicz, Director of Faith Formation at Holy Spirit Catholic Community, Naperville, IL recounts is an excellent example: "Our parish had not been streaming Masses and we have antiquated systems. Yet, we immediately knew that we would need to adapt. As we explored the possibilities, we reached out into the community and found a parishioner to assist us in taping and posting Mass on-line. He was a professional in marketing and had some contacts in the audio-video world. He called upon a friend with high quality equipment. The friend agreed to come for Palm Sunday and Easter to tape and broadcast those Masses.

At the end of Easter Mass, the friend said that he could tell the importance of this ministry and knew I would not want to stop. He was unemployed at the time, had the equipment, didn't live in the neighborhood, and wasn't even Catholic! Yet, he agreed to assist us as long as he was able. He lent us the necessary equipment and we continued taping. As work became available, he had to take some of the equipment. We supplemented the equipment by borrowing from a wedding photographer. Here it is July, and we finally upgraded what we had and are able to return all of his equipment. The Masses continue to be taped so that those who are not comfortable returning to church yet, still have the ability to participate."

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6- Learning is always connected to experience.

How are we - will we - help people live through this?

- How will we help reflect on their experiences and feelings – as they go through this and when it's (finally) all over?
- What are we doing to give people a safe space to talk about how they really feel?
- How are we helping look at the realities of our tradition (spiritual practices) that will help them through this?

“When people come together again,” commented Fr. Bob Fambrini, SJ of St. Francis Xavier Parish in Phoenix, "I want them to debrief in small groups, reflecting not only on their recent experience but how it could lead to a new way of being together, a new way of being Church.”

That would be important to do; how are we also helping people to talk about their feelings and experiences right now?

As always, each individual parish doesn't have to create everything. One of the roles of the staff and adult faith formation committee is to be aware of the offerings in the surrounding area (when we can gather) as well as online and keep our parishioners up-to-date about the many possibilities.

Siena Retreat Center (below) in Racine, WI (<https://www.sienaretreatcenter.org/>) has offered several online sharing sessions each month.

The screenshot shows the Siena Retreat Center website. At the top, there is a navigation menu with links for RETREATS & PROGRAMS, PRIVATE RETREATS, SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE, and TRAINING PROGRAMS. The main heading is "COVID19 Experience Sharing July 14". Below this, there is an "OVERVIEW" section and a "FACILITATOR" section. The facilitator is a man with glasses, identified as Everett Rice. The text describes the session as a one-time Zoom sharing session led by trained facilitators, where participants can share their experiences of quarantine, furlough, job loss, illness, or death of a friend or loved one. The session is on Tuesday, July 14, 2020, from 7:00 - 8:30pm. It is free of charge, and a free-will offering would be gladly accepted. There are also links to other sessions on Wednesday, July 8, and Wednesday, June 10, and Monday, June 22.

For those who would like to listen to ideas and inspiration rather than engage in personal sharing at this time, there are also many opportunities available, such as “Stepping Toward the Future in the Time of Coronavirus.”

Many people participated in the original broadcast of this by Weber Retreat and Conference Center in Adrian, MI. It is now archived and available for

The screenshot shows a flyer for a "Digital Small Group: Stress, Anxiety and Faith in a Coronavirus World". The flyer is titled "Sharing hope during uncertain times" and is held on Mondays, 7:30-8:30pm. It features a quote from Einstein: "No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it." The flyer also includes a photo of hands holding a black heart and the text "Join us on Saturdays at 4 pm EST via Zoom". The flyer is set against a background of colorful, flowing lines.

These two parishes provided online times to gather – with many parishioners responding to each opportunity.

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anyone at any time. (<https://webercenter.org/2020/05/stepping-toward-the-future-in-the-time-of-coronavirus/>)

Stepping Toward the Future in the Time of Coronavirus



Living in this coronavirus time makes many people want to hop, skip, and jump to anywhere but the here and now! The truth is, the only way out is through. Our challenge is to lean into the present moment, even when we want to run away.

Weber Retreat and Conference Center invites you to join Joan Ebbitt, LMSW, for a free, four-part weekly series called "Stepping Toward the Future in the Time of Coronavirus." Joan is an **Adrian Dominican Associate** and one of Weber Center's spiritual directors.



Joan will examine the supportive spirituality of the first three Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous and reflect on how they can help with the daunting sense of powerlessness many are feeling right now.

7- As always, think of your audience first.

The best content we can share is content that addresses our audience's most basic needs, their pain points, answers their questions, and celebrates their interests.

Especially during this time, consider:

- What are the biggest problems they are trying to solve?
- What do they need most?
- What information are they searching for?
- What trends and current events are influencing their personal faith journey?
- What do people really need (not what we want to do or think they need)?

During this time, are you experiencing that your adults, your families are exhausted and overwhelmed?

- Are they asking for "content" – something to study? (some might be)
- Are the majority asking for and/or or needing inspiration, support, ways to cope and survive?

One example of inspiration, support and connection was done by my community (but could easily be done by a parish, especially with a parishioner who has technology/video skills). Our communications department invited the sisters and the co-workers on our motherhouse campus to use their phone or tablet to make a short (40-60 second) video of themselves responding to the question: "Where or how have you found joy/goodness/peace while sheltering in place?"

These short videos were then put together into one video ... which contained encouraging, realistic and practical ideas.

Next few issues

- Our next issue – in a couple weeks – will continue to look at a few more principles and practices for these times.
- The following few issues will continue to share some things that parishes are doing – or could be doing – during these times. If you have ideas/suggestions of things that are working for you (or what you learned from the things that aren't working), I'd love to hear about them: jschaeffler@adriandominicans.org. (Thanks!)



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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>