



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

124 - September 18, 2020

Some Principles and Practices for These Times (Part III)

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.

In our last issue we began to explore some of them. This issue continues that exploration, accompanied by some real-life practices (in purple font) adopted by parishes today which concretely and sensitively live them.

9- Shift from teaching to equipping.

Teaching is important, but often every environment and program that has been offered in the past was designed to teach people using one-way communication rather than equipping people with the tools and resources they needed to

- engage with Scripture
- deepen spiritual practices and
- live out God's mission for their lives

Today's reality reminds us that our task is to help people move from consuming content to engaging a personal, spiritual journey to follow and become like Jesus.

Ana Olaso Stanham, Adult Faith Formation Director at St Louis Parish, Pinecrest, FL tells us about one (of the many) opportunities at St. Louis. Today the parish is 89% Hispanic, about half of that number are first generation immigrant (a significant number of them not the typical migration though: wealthy, bilingual and professional from Venezuela, Colombia and other Latin American countries. They use technology to keep connected to their church at home.

Thus, many of the small groups at St. Louis are connecting with small groups (comunidades de base) from Latin America through Zoom. The connections were found through Facebook, FB, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube live, family and friends, including the clergy.

During the first days of the universal church lockdown people were sending resources and program opportunities to relatives and friends. Connections were made and experiences were shared trying to make sense of these unprecedented times and groups were established. A priest from Venezuela forwarded to Ana some material produced by the Archdiocese of Caracas for the domestic church that moved the Venezuelan families at St. Louis to tears.

Some St. Louis parishioners got connected to the Jesuit Institute of South Africa which had produced two series "Accompanying" and "The Journey" which they found helpful <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCI7-yew-mIfWV02tpfBywFQ>. The world became smaller and more connected. People continued to discover that we are a diverse universal church that expresses itself in various ways (and they found that supportive).

From the comunidades de base, the base communities of Latin America, the parishioners of St. Louis have experienced a different way of being church. Since the lockdown began and churches closed, the clergy in many places throughout Latin America have been facilitating "bread ceremonies" to help people live the Eucharist as domestic churches. They reminded the people what it was like to break bread for the primitive church, to become the broken bread shared in love for other.

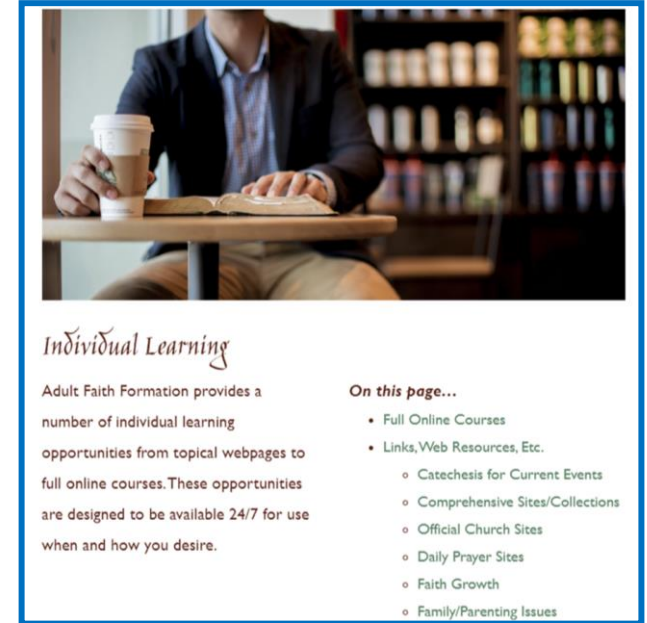
10- There is an abundance of tools and content available for us.

There always has been! Now, there's more than ever. The creativity and dedication of people and organizations has – in these times – developed and expanded. Our role is one of curation: to find it, discern what is good and needed for our community and share it. There is no need for us to create everything from scratch.

- Develop a webpage for self-directed independent learning with courses from seminaries, universities, retreat centers, etc., such as:
 - [STM Online: Crossroads](#)
 - [Virtual Learning Community for Faith Formation](#)

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- [STEP Online Courses](#)
- [Encore](#)
- [Weber Retreat and Conference Center](#)
- [Dominican Retreat and Conference Center](#)
- Create a webpage which alerts people to some of the various sites and apps for prayer and learning, such as:
 - [Bread4Today](#)
 - [Explore Faith](#)
 - [Three Minute Retreat](#)
 - [Catholic News Service](#)
 - [Catholic Charities USA](#)
 - [Busted Halo](#)
 - [A Concord Pastor Comments](#)
 - [Sacred Space](#)



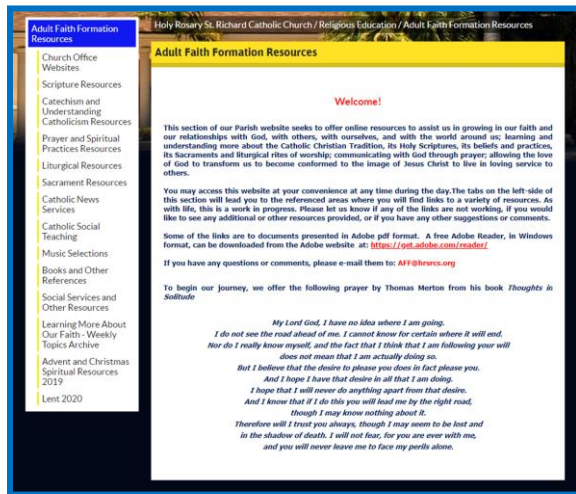
This website, also, provides parishioners and visitors with links to a number of resources for their use.

https://www.hrschurch.org/religious_education/adult_faith_formation_resources

11- Pay attention to small groups.

From the very beginning, the church has often grown and thrived among small groups of disciples. Jesus began with the twelve apostles, and throughout the letters of St. Paul we see him referring to small groups of disciples. This paradigm, which we see in Scripture, has continued throughout the history of the church.

The late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin remarked, “In the U.S., many of our parishes are quite large and, consequently, may exhibit anonymity more than community. In such settings, it is often difficult for effective evangelization to take place. A possible solution is to restructure the parish as a community of communities. In such a vision and structure, Catholics gather in small groups determined by neighborhood, family, needs, interests, or a common ministry



This is a section of the adult faith formation page from St. Francis of Assisi parish in Fulton, MD which provides direct links to a number of sites grouped according to various themes.

<http://adultfaith.instrumentofpeace.org/individual/>

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in order to pray, read Scripture and share. Authentic community is vital to effective evangelization. It nurtures believers. If Catholics experience community on a smaller scale, they may form and experience more of a community when they gather for parish liturgies on the weekends.”

Pope John Paul II wrote in *Ecclesia in America* that "One way of renewing parishes, especially urgent for parishes in large cities, might be to consider the parish as a community of communities and movements. It seems timely therefore to form ecclesial communities and groups of a size that allows for true human relationships. This will make it possible to live communion more intensely, ensuring that it is fostered not only ad intra, but also with the parish communities to which such groups belong and with the entire diocesan and universal church. In such a human context it will be easier to gather to hear the word of God, to reflect on the range of human problems in the light of this word and gradually to make responsible decisions inspired by the all-embracing love of Christ."

Today many parishes and (arch)dioceses invite people into a deeper relationship with Jesus through the small group format and through small group ministry.

It seems that these small groups – in many places – were the first to adapt to the demands of living through this pandemic.

As we slowly begin to return to gathering, it will be in small groups (possibly for quite a while). Can we take advantage of this reality by inviting new groups, by supporting and encouraging groups which are already in existence?

One small group participant shared, “Small home groups will become the nucleus of who we are, of how we’re supported and sent on mission. My home group has continued to meet by Zoom on Thursday evenings at seven. It has been great to see each other’s faces, share prayer requests and hear updates on each other’s families. Last Thursday evening we met face to face for the first time in three months in our leaders’ back yard – s’mores included.”

Kris Rooney, adult faith formation director at St. Kateri Tekakwitha Parish, Schenectady, NY reflected, “I can’t express how important these small groups have been for parishioners during this time. We have truly found Christ in our discussions, and experienced a grace-filled intimacy.”

These are just a few examples of parishes inviting people to small faith-sharing groups:

- [Holy Cross Parish](#) in Kincumber, New South Wales, Australia
- [The Basilica of St. Mary](#), Minneapolis, MN
- [Most Holy Rosary Parish](#), Antioch, CA
- [St. Albert the Great Parish](#), Austin, TX
- [St. Simon and Jude Catholic Community](#), Huntington Beach, CA

Some resources and ideas for small groups:

- The USCCB website provides an outline/guide for [Small Faith Community Sharing On Faithful Citizenship](#)
- [RENEW International](#) provides small-group programs ranging from four weeks to four years; from evangelization to the environment; from single books to parish-wide initiatives with pastoral consultation, training, and resources.
- [How to Form Faith-Sharing Groups](#)
- [Small Groups--Big Impact: Reconnecting the Parish in the Wake of Covid-19](#)
- [Small Groups 101: Transforming Parishes Through Small Groups](#)
- [Small Faith Community Models](#)
- [Hosting Small Faith Groups: A Summary of Links](#)
- [North American Forum for Small Christian Communities](#)

GEMS Wonderings

- Which one(s) of these principles have you realized anew and/or has guided you during these times?
- Is there another insight that surfaced for you during these days?

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- As we go forward to plan for a new season of adult faith formation,
 - What have you learned that will guide you?
 - Who will you listen to?
 - Who will support you?
 - What do you want to keep in mind?

Next few issues

My plan right now for the next few issues (it seems things change quickly during these times) is 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!)



Adding New Luster to an Older Gem

GEMS #86-88 explored gardening as a way of formation, of spirituality. Some quotes and continuing reflections:

In 2014, the Rev. Anna Woofenden moved to Los Angeles to try a bold experiment: to re-envision church as an outdoor community centered on a garden. As a church, the community would grow food, prepare it and eat it together, and share it with the neighborhood.

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/earthbeat/if-were-reimagining-church-lets-take-it-outside>

“Gardening can provide an opportunity to slow down, be still, breathe, and connect with another form of life. For me, it is an experience of communion; I become one with this precious life in my garden and it heightens my experience of love in the world. And that is what spirituality is all about: growing in love.”

~ Judith Handelsman in [*Growing Myself: A Spiritual Journey Through Gardening*](#)

In “Grow your Spirit in Fertile Soil,” Rebecca Bratten Weiss reflects on how the life cycles of a garden have a lot in common with those in our own lives.

<http://www.uscatholic.org/articles/201803/grow-your-spirit-fertile-soil-31324?utm>

A Zen roshi is dying. All of the monks gather - and eagerness restrained around the deathbed, hoping to be chosen as the next teacher.

The roshi asks slowly, “Where is the gardener?”

“The gardener,” the monks wonder aloud. “He is just a simple man who tends the plants, and he is not even ordained.”

“Yes,” the roshi replies. “But he is the only one awake.”

He will be the next teacher.”



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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>