



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

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Best Practices: Some Things These Pandemic Times Have Taught Us (Part IV)

Our previous three issues explored some new things we have learned; new methods we have used; this issue continues that exploration. In the midst of many challenges, we have discovered new insights, new practices. These realities are not only true for these times but for the days, months, and years ahead.

15- Parishes have to (need to) continue to connect with their parishioners in many ways.

This was clearly expressed in a recent article by Christian Mocek (*National Catholic Reporter*, August 6, 2020): “What became clear to us after weeks of watching online Mass was that it boiled down to watching someone else pray. We who sat in our living room weren't experiencing a sacrament. We were watching someone else experience it. ...

After further reflection, I've come to realize my problem was not with livestreamed Mass. ... I think it's an important ministry and it should continue.

My problem with virtual Mass was that it was the only form of ministry I was experiencing from my parish. And because it was the only form of ministry — it was wholly inadequate.

I have witnessed creativity and ingenuity in ministry during this difficult time. I saw parishes and priests who hosted a daily evening prayer, a weekly rosary, or weekly virtual Bible study. I've seen parishes offering virtual lectures and other learning opportunities. I know of priests and deacons who call their homebound parishioners to check in.

I think that is a good start to the new kind of community parishes are building. Because, we are, in fact, in the process of building a new kind of community. There will not be a return to the way things were. How could there be? The world has changed and so have we.

And moving forward, that kind of ingenuity and creativity is what I'm asking of our priests and parishes. In short, how can I pray with you? Because, I'm tired of watching you pray. ...

So, our parishes must consider how to create virtual and in-person worship experiences that are communal and meaningful.

- What resources can we send to our parishioners to support their prayer at home?
- How can we support young families, our elders, our homebound in their experience of faith at home?
- What do we have to do to make human connections in a time when those things are in short supply?”



As more return to Mass, I hope parishes and priests remember those of us on the outside who are desperately wishing we could be there in person. I hope they know that those at home want to feel like their presence in their community of faith still matters and that their presence in the pew is missed.

As we move forward, let's remember virtual ministry should not only be livestreamed Mass.

(Christian Mocek)



16- In many ways, the use of digital opportunities in our ministry is just getting started.

As ministerial leaders today, we have dreams, hopes and prayers that seem infinite; we also live within the constraints of limited time, energy and resources.

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As we go forward, many practitioners offer these suggestions (among many others):

- Staff our online ministry like it is real, because it is. Usually, most parishes cultivate their online presence by tacking it onto the job description of someone who already has an overwhelming 24/7 ministry. Then once every five years, the church allocates X number of dollars to hire someone to redo their website hoping that will fix the problem for another half-decade.

The vast majority of parishes have – until now – spent 99% of their staffing dollars on in-person gatherings. We probably won't have a big impact online when we spend 1% of our staffing resources on it.

At the same time, this is an opportune time to develop a new ministry within the parish, calling for the gifts and talents of many parishioners (especially the young) who live and work in the digital world.

One small faith-sharing group wasn't sure how to do Zoom, so asked a young adult (who had never participated in any adult formation at the parish) to help them the first time they went virtual. He gladly did and became so intrigued with the conversation, prayer and faith-sharing that he asked to join the group.

- Treat the people you're reaching online as though they're real people, because they are.
- Some of the money we were going to put in to physical ministry needs to go into digital ministry. In reality, digital ministry doesn't come close to costing as much as physical ministry does. See [The Home Studio Gear Guide: Here's all the Equipment You Need Even on a Tiny Budget](#)

We haven't really started yet. The 'innovation' that happened in the first few months of the lockdown wasn't really innovation. It was adaptation. After a month of online liturgies, a lot of parish leaders settled into a pattern that would get them through the next few months and stopped experimenting.

That means, in many ways, the innovation hasn't even started yet. If we're really going to be faithful to our mission, serve your people and reach new people, it's going to take a lot of innovation and experimentation.

Which means we're called to stay curious and agile. Positioning our parishes for strong digital ministry positions our church for the future. It's a crucial way – in the future - to reach people.



“In a world of change, the learners shall inherit the earth,
while the learned shall find themselves perfectly suited for a
world that no longer exists.”

(Eric Hoffer)



16- Although, in these times, technology is here to stay, everything doesn't have to be technological.

Not everyone in our parishes have technology available. As always, our ministry needs to be both/and. As always, we need to keep the question – who are we missing? – in our planning and responding.

Some possibilities, especially for connection, during these times (and beyond):

Phone Tree Connection

Many parishes have had phone tree connections for years. Usually, this is a system where people are grouped and someone is the leader of each group. The leader is responsible for calling and sharing information with the people on their branch of the phone tree. Often this has been used to communicate weather delays, prayer concerns,



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notices of funerals, etc. How might we use these today – or set one up if we don't have one?

Another way that phone trees have been organized is by alphabetical order: Sally might contact everyone whose last name begins with A-B; Danny might contact everyone whose last name begins with C-D; all the way through the end of the alphabet. This might be easily implemented for most parishes. The people who are already checking in on the home-bound and those healing from illness or surgeries might make great phone tree leaders.

Prayer Connection

Many parishes have a formal pictorial membership directory for their parish. Others might have a printed contact list. Encourage parishioners to pray daily for the people that are in the directory/on the contact list. This encourages people to pray for each other by name and helps keep them connected to God and each other in prayer.



They might also want to call or send a note to people to check on them and let them know they prayed for them. (For a low technology adaptation, use texts and/or email.)

The prayer responses could also be divided up in different ways.

- Someone could review the directory/contact list and divide it up by page. Then, divide the page into halves and invite two people from that page to pray for their half of the people on that page.
- Each week during social distancing, pair up people in the directory/contact list with each other as prayer partners. As a prayer partner they would pray for their partner every day during the week, and would call them to check in on them during the week. These prayer assignments could change every week, so that they would get to connect with people they may know well or may be new connections for them.
- You might also do a "Pass the Peace" adaptation. Invite people to find their name in the directory/contact list. Everyone on that page and the next page would be their "neighbors." Invite people to

connect with their neighbors by a phone call, card, or note that shares the peace of Christ with them. If they do not know them, they have a chance to make a new neighbor, a new acquaintance in the parish.

Remember, too, that on any given Sunday you have visitors that might not be in the directory/contact list, so think of ways you might include them, too.

Faith Formation Connection

There are many ways to continue to inspire, equip, and encourage everyone in taking next steps in their daily faith journey.

- Daily Scripture
A phone tree can be used to send daily or weekly Scripture verses, two or three study questions, and a prayer.
- For the parishioners who have access to cell phones, a daily verse can be texted to them. In this practice, everyone in the parish is connected through reading and praying the same daily scripture. If they have an email address this can be sent to there, too.
- A weekly bible verse can be sent in an encouraging card or in an envelope through the postal service on a weekly basis.
- Send a weekly bible study or small group study that includes a passage of scripture and a list of questions that would be helpful for diving deeply into the scripture. This can be emailed, texted or weekly mailed.



Weekly Prayer Stations

On a weekly basis send a set of cards for prayer stations. Prayer stations are interactive ways to pray that often include an action or word for people to participate in.

There are many prayer stations on the internet that are ready to print and



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are free. Many require materials such as paper, pencil, markers, crayons, etc.

17- Many parishes are helping people to learn technology

- St. Cecilia Parish in Boson, includes detailed directions on their parish website for getting started on Zoom.

GETTING STARTED ON ZOOM

Getting started on Zoom

As we continue to find new ways to stay connected with our community, we encourage you to use this Zoom to check in with friends, loved ones, or even your fellow ministry members. Zoom is a great, free tool, to video and audio conference with others. See below for information on how to set up Zoom.

1. Download Zoom on your device.

For Phone

- Go to App Store (Apple) or Google Play (Android).
- Search for Zoom Cloud Meetings and install.

From Desktop

- Go to www.zoom.us/download
- Click on Zoom Client For Meetings to download.
- Be sure to choose YES when asked about allowing the app to make changes to your device.
- To utilize the video option (for others to see your face) your device must have a webcam.

2. Once downloaded, follow the prompts to create your account.

- Kris Rooney, adult faith formation director at St. Kateri Tekakwitha Parish in Schenectady, NY shares, “I have been touched by the mature adults that have really tried to figure out technology. I had to teach some by doing practice Zoom calls over the phone to guide

them through. I did this with one woman who is 90 years old and she comes to almost all of my groups now.”

18- Parishes are finding ways to safely social distance.

- This online suggestion has been adopted by several churches to provide connection for people: Pop in for Popsicles. People drive their cars up to receive a popsicle from a masked volunteer. They can wave to one another and sit out in lawn chairs (6 feet apart and masked!) to talk with friends.
- At Holy Spirit Catholic Community, Naperville, IL small faith-sharing groups are having Picnics in the Parking Lot, social distancing while eating an individually packed lunch to do a little in-person processing of materials they have used on their own or on Zoom gatherings.



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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>