



# GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

*from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study*

#151 - October 1, 2021

## **A Best Practice: Advent by Candlelight (In-person and virtual)**

Started by women in the 1970s, *Advent by Candlelight* is now celebrated by Catholic (and many Christian) churches throughout the United States, Canada and Europe. It is an annual gathering of those who choose to step away from the busy-ness and chaos of the holiday season to focus on the core meaning of Advent/Christmas.

As most things, there are multiple ways of structuring the gathering:

- In most places it is for women, but some parishes have planned it for both women and men.
- Usually it takes place on an evening at the beginning of Advent; some parishes have offered it on an Advent Sunday afternoon.
- Most often parishioners – hostesses – decorate the tables (more information below); in some cases, the parishes take care of this task.
- Usually the table hostesses provide the hors d'oeuvres and/or desserts; sometimes, all the people at the table bring something to share. In some instances, the parish has provided the food, even including a catered dinner.

## **A Usual Structure and “Agenda”**

- Women sign up to host tables for an evening of food, community, reflection and prayer.
- These hostesses invite women to be a part of their table. Most parishes also set up and host tables for those who would like to come but might not know one of the hostesses.
- On the day of the event, hostesses arrive early with boxes of dishes, silverware and centerpieces to decorate their tables. Each table welcomes the guests and reflects the theme of the Advent season. Candles are an essential ingredient.

- The food can be provided in various ways: by the hostesses, the guests at each table, or the parish.
- The evening (or afternoon) begins with socializing and an opportunity to tour the tables, appreciating the care, the beauty and the symbols of the season.

Often with lowered lights, the program unfolds, usually including a prayer time with Scripture readings, music and a guest speaker with a reflection on the Advent season; followed, then, by the sharing of the food.

- As the evening takes place in candlelight, the participants are reminded that they gather in and because of Christ, the true light of the season.



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## *Advent by Candlelight during Covid*

For many parishes, *Advent by Candlelight* was not cancelled in 2020; as many opportunities that year, it just occurred in a different format.

One such parish was St. Owen in Bloomfield Hills, MI. The co-chairs of the event for several years, Cecilia Yee and Barb Johns, announced: “Our 17th annual Advent by Candlelight will take place on Tuesday, Dec 1, 2020 from 7-8:00 PM **via Zoom**.” In past years, when the evening was in-person, this event supported the parish’s *Sharing with a Family Program*. (In 2019 fifty-one families (251 people) were each given gift cards to purchase personal gifts and food for their Christmas dinner thanks to the donations from the Advent By Candlelight evening and the generosity of sponsoring families.) This part of the event continued during the 2020 virtual gathering.

The invite to all parishioners provided the information for registering:



Registration is now currently open through 12 noon on November 30, go to [www.stowen.org](http://www.stowen.org), Advent by Candlelight, and click on “To Register click here” button to fill in your name and contact info, and you are all set.

A link will be sent to all registered participants via your email address the afternoon of November 30. A donation button is also available at registration; proceeds benefit our Sharing With A Family Christmas program. Every donation helps make a difference, thank you for this consideration.

Please do not share the link. Every attendee needs to register so we can control the numbers. (We have the capacity to accommodate up to 500 participants)



About 70 women attended this virtual *Advent by Candlelight*; prior to the evening they each received a program which included Zoom instructions, such as how to mute themselves, etc. During the evening, each woman had a candle lit in her home, in view of the camera.

The evening included:

- The parish music minister playing Advent music as the women gathered.
- A welcome – with reminders about Zoom participation.
- A brief reminder that all donations would benefit the parish’s *Advent Sharing with a Family Program*.
- Music with the lighting of the Advent Wreath in church.
- Msgr. Michael Lefevre, pastor of St. Owen, prayed the opening prayer and introduced Nancy Mason Bordley, D. Min.
- Nancy spoke for about 20 minutes on the theme of: “Home for the Holidays: An Invitation into the Heart of Advent and Christmas.”
- Nancy then invited the participants into breakout rooms for about 15 minutes for the women to share a thought or insight of how they hoped to share Advent.
- At the conclusion of the breakout rooms and Nancy’s closing remarks, Barb Johns (one of the co-chairs), who had done a painting of Mary and the Christ Child shared her inspiration and method for the painting.
- Barb invited the participants to unmute themselves and pray the prayer that was shown on a slide.
- A copy of the painting accompanied by the prayer on the back of the card were made accessible to all parishioners in the narthex of

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the Church. Additionally, prayer cards were provided to the various organizations the parish supports for Christmas sharing.



*Lord, Strengthen  
the hearts  
of all of us  
who hope in you.  
Bring us peace,  
just as the infant Jesus  
was comforted in his  
mother's arms.  
Amen.*

- After a thank you to all who attended as well as all who planned the evening, the parish music minister closed the evening with song.
- The women were invited to stay on Zoom for several minutes, if they chose, to socialize with the others.

The following suggestion was also made to the participants:



To satisfy your need for fellowship; we suggest that in addition to our one-hour online Advent by Candlelight event; you may consider hosting you own Zoom at a date and time of your choice, inviting guests to gather, create a theme of what you want to share during that time, talk and reflect on the wonder and beauty of Advent; the hope of tomorrow.



Michelle Novaco, the Christian Service coordinator at St. Owen, shared the response of the participants:

“The response from the guests was one of great appreciation and gratitude that we assembled the *Advent by Candlelight* program. When planning with Nancy and discussing with the co-chairs, we kept coming back to the two things the women always love:

- fellowship
- feeding the soul.

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I feel that with the program we presented we were able to do both of these successfully. I know the women expressed that more programs like these would be wonderful.”

For those unable to attend on December 1, the parish provided a recorded version on their church website after the event:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wTt34DYdcUM>

## Some resources for *Advent by Candlelight*:

- [Advent by Candlelight Resources](#)
- [Advent-By-Candlelight: Your Easy-to-Use Guide to a Unique, Memorable Event](#)
- <http://storage.cloversites.com/crossoflife/documents/Advent%20by%20Candlelight%20Hostess%20inform>



Some examples of *Advent by Candlelight* (in person and virtual) which will illustrate for you the diversity of approaches:

- <https://ctrcc.com/advent-by-candlelight>

- <https://www.stowen.org/advent-by-candlelight-info>
- <https://www.christthekingcatholic.church/adventbycandlelight>
- <https://stedward.org/advent-by-candlelight>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EaPhFACdJvE>
- <https://htlenexa.org/advent-by-candlelight>
- <https://www.stlhouston.org/advent-by-candlelight/>
- <https://www.churchofsaintmary.com/advent-by-candlelight-2020/>
- <https://www.stpaulbangor.me/advent-by-candlelight>
- <https://www.straphaelarchangel.org/advent-candlelight>
- <https://micatholictribune.com/stories/567225366-st-regis-catholic-parish-bloomfield-hills-advent-by-candlelight>
- <https://detroitcatholic.com/news/elizabeth-wong-barnstead/advent-by-candlelight-traditions-catch-on-in-parishes>
- <https://d2y1pz2y630308.cloudfront.net/14457/documents/2016/11/Advent%20by%20Candlelight%20Flyer.pdf>
- <https://olpillar.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Advent-by-Candlelight.pdf>
- <http://sthilarychurch.org/adventbycandlelight/>
- <https://familyofchristtampa.com/advent-by-candlelight/>
- <https://ourladyoffatima.org/advent-by-candlelight-2020/>
- <https://www.mqpwg.org/Resources/News/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/205660/Advent-by-Candlelight--Nov-29>

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- <http://www.piusxkf.com/documents/Advent%20by%20Candlelight%20Handout.pdf>

## Another type of gathering

Sometimes *Advent by Candlelight* is called an *Advent Tea*. Would there be other times that a “Tea” could be offered in your parish? See:

- [GEMS #61](#): : Lenten Soup & Bread
- [GEMS #82](#): A Celebration with Art and Tea

## GEMS Wonderings

- Have you hosted an *Advent by Candlelight* in the past? How might you do it for Advent 2021?
- Will you do it online or in person?
- If you offer it in person, could you also provide it online – for those who are unable to be present in person?
- Might you have a gathering such as this at other times, e.g. Valentine’s Day, beginning of Lent, etc.?



## Adding New Luster to Some Older GEMS

As we’re thinking about Advent – many of our **GEMS** issues in the past have looked at hospitality. These three articles provide additional reflection and suggestions for hospitality during Advent time:

- [The Best Gift – A Visit](#)
- [Advent Parish Checklist](#)
- [7 Ways to Welcome Church Visitors on Christmas Eve](#)



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Past issues of **GEMS** are archived at [www.janetschaeffler.com](http://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*
  - <https://www.lifelongfaith.com/books.html>
  - [https://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/seasons of aff - journal special issue.pdf](https://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/seasons_of_faith_journal_special_issue.pdf)