



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

#167 - June 1, 2022

A Best Practice: Building a Ministry for Maturing Adults (Part I)

Fortunately today, more and more parishes and (arch)dioceses are becoming aware of the necessity to pay serious attention to the needs of the maturing adults within their parishes and communities.

GEMS #75 and #76 highlighted the endeavors of St. Mary's Parish, Barrie, Ontario, Canada. This issue and the following one will look at the enthusiastic and growing efforts of St. Mark the Evangelist Parish, Indianapolis, IN. Before looking at some of the programs (in our next issue), we begin in this issue where all adult faith formation begins: committed planning, involving many people, discerning the needs and enticing marketing. (These efforts began prior to Covid; in the next issue we will also look at their efforts during the pandemic.)

It is lovely to meet an old person whose face
is deeply lined, a face that has been deeply inhabited,
to look in the eyes and find light there.

~John O'Donohue

How It Began

A parishioner, Steve Helmich, had been a head football coach, chamber of commerce president, and Catholic high school president. Then, when he wasn't any of those roles, he became concerned about what "the last chapters" were going to look like.

When Steve read *A New Vision of Parish Ministry for Maturing Adults: How to Construct, Organize, and Sustain a Vibrant Faith Formation Program for the Second Half of Life* (Richard P. Johnson) and *Deepening Faith: Adult Faith Formation in the Parish* (Janet Schaeffler, OP) he had an "ah-hah" moment. Steve went to all of the weekend liturgies and counted "gray haired folks."

Steve then had coffee/lunch with some of these maturing adults to see if his struggles were at all similar to theirs. And they were. There was a gap between where people were and where they wanted to be at this time in their lives.

Steve likewise realized that the parish was not offering programs and activities to walk with maturing adults on their journey. Steve, and four other parishioners, continued exploring their own second half of life experiences and what they felt was needed and would be successful at the parish. After meeting with the pastor and receiving his approval and strong support, the efforts for Ministry for Maturing Adults (MMA) began.

The MMS (Ministry for Maturing Adults) Steering Committee

The first step was to put together a Steering Committee. After women and men who would be good candidates were identified by Steve, the pastor, the staff, Steve met personally with each one and invited them to serve in this new venture – which would be totally led by parishioners.

The MMA Steering Committee is comprised of fifteen women and men from the parish. A very diverse group, it represents, by age, gender, and skill-sets, the group of folks they serve. The Steering Committee meets regularly to discuss what programs will be offered, to determine who the program leader(s) will be for each program, to decide how the program will be marketed, and to review the participant feedback received at the conclusion of the program.

*St. Mark the Evangelist Parish
Ministry for Maturing Adults
Steering Committee Job Description*

Current demographics indicate that senior adults are beginning to outnumber the younger generation and are living twenty to thirty years longer than previous generations. They are a "New Generation" and in need of on-going faith development and support through all the opportunities, challenges, and transitions that mark the second half of life.

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A Ministry for Maturing Adults will be formed at St. Mark Parish to respond to this "New Generation." This ministry will be overseen by a Steering Committee whose responsibilities will be:

- *To generate ideas and suggestions for programs and activities; to evaluate the needs of maturing adults in the parish*
- *To review plans and give suggestions for events, projects, and programs*
- *To facilitate implementation of programs and activities by identifying, recruiting, enabling, and supporting others in taking on leadership roles, usually on an ad hoc basis*
- *To review activities undertaken, assess impact, and to make recommendations for future action*
- *To work collaboratively within the overall parish plan with a commitment to the unity of parish life*
- *To make recommendations for the on-going development of the ministry*
- *To be, at all times, an enthusiastic and vocal "champion" for the ministry for maturing adults*
- *To encourage others in the parish to become part of the ministry for maturing adults*

The various committees within the Steering Committee include:

- *Spiritual Growth*
- *Continuous Learning*
- *Events and Social Gatherings*
- *Service*
- *Human Resources*
- *Marketing and Communication*
- *Budgeting and Funds Development*

Old age is no time to hunker down,
unless disability demands it.

Old is just another word for nothing left to lose,
a time of life to take bigger risks
on behalf of the common good.

~ Parker Palmer

Discerning Needs

It was pretty clear, from early meetings of members of the Steering Committee, that there were categories of programs and activities in which MMA would probably want to engage. They quickly identified:

- faith formation/spiritual development
- continued learning
- opportunities to serve
- opportunities to be served
- social activities

As they began to work and brainstorm, three members of the Steering Committee gave a pulpit talk one weekend at the end of all the Masses. At its conclusion, they invited the parishioners to share their thoughts through a questionnaire.

Representatives from the Steering Committee were in the narthex distributing the questionnaires as people left the church. In addition, tables were set up with the questionnaires, pens, pamphlets, and a marketing poster so representatives could talk directly with interested parishioners.

There was now a buzz about the new ministry; the committee was at the point of getting started - ready and needing to "do something." Even though they had the results of the questionnaires, there was no confidence that they knew what the parish's maturing adults REALLY wanted and needed, what they were yearning for. The members were very aware that they needed the

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first offerings to be rock-solid and truly meeting a need if they were going to be able to build a strong and sustainable program that attracted participants.

They also intuitively knew that if folks felt they had had a voice in building the programmatic offerings they would be much more inclined to participate.

One member of the committee – Donna Kern – who has a strong background in conference and event management suggested holding parish listening sessions, which would be designed with only a few easy to answer questions that would be constructed so that through the answers the parishioners could tell the committee their needs in an intimate but supportive setting and the committee could also find out their wants which would help give direction to the strategic planning of future events.

Donna relates, “I could feel the Spirit moving within me, the committee and the parish. So all credit to the planning and the outcome of the listening session goes to the Lord.”

Donna began with a subcommittee of three whose role was to develop the questions. The team was expanded to about twenty enormously gifted and experienced parishioners; these additional persons would have the roles of table leaders and table assistants at the actual listening sessions. Formation was provided for them during last two planning sessions which gave them opportunity for input and/or questions.

Donna also recruited two individuals who had strong facilitation skills to facilitate each of the listening sessions. These two women joined the planning process; their input was crucial in helping mold the final product.

The planning committee also felt that it was very important for everyone from the Steering Committee was able to participate in the listening session so that they also had the opportunity to be share their ideas.

A mailing was sent to the homes of mature adult in the parish and Steering Committee members divided the list and called each mature adult to encourage attendance at the listening sessions.

Dear St. Mark Maturing Adult,

The newest ministry at St. Mark the Evangelist Parish is the Ministry for Maturing Adults. Much thought and planning has gone into this ministry

which is designed to help adults 55 years of age and older find purpose in this stage of their life.

Now it's time for you to tell the Ministry for Maturing Adults' Steering Committee what you want and need from this ministry. On Monday, April 29th the Steering Committee will host Listening Sessions in Monsignor Schafer Hall. We are offering two times for these sessions, 4:30-6:30 p.m. and 7:00-9:00 p.m. Come and bring a friend. Share your thoughts about activities you would like to be part of.

Please RSVP by Tuesday, April 23rd. You can RSVP by completing the bottom of this letter and putting it in the collection basket at Mass or dropping it off at the Parish Center.

God has called each of us to be holy ... to be our best selves. Help us make the Ministry for Maturing Adults all that it can be.

The Ministry for Maturing Adults Steering Committee

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Address: _____

Choose one session: _____ 4:30-6:30 p.m. _____ 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Transportation needed to attend Listening Session _____

The spiritual eyesight improves
as the physical eyesight declines.

~ Plato

Still to Come

In **GEMS #169** we'll learn about

- the process of the Listening Sessions
- what the committee learned from the sessions
- their enticing Kick-Off Event



Adding New Luster to an Older Gem

In **GEMS** issues #64-66 we explored various ways throughout the world that parishes are supporting grandparents – in their various settings and circumstances.

Here are several articles and resources which might continue to assist parishes in their ministry to grandparents:

- [Studies Show Kids Need Grandparents More Than We Realize](#)
- [Pope Francis Cites Need to Achieve 'Broad Educational Compact'](#) (and the importance of grandparents in that)
- [Grandparents Discipling Grandchildren](#)
- [Grandparents and the Faith Formation "Tent"](#)
- [4 Unique Things We Do for Our Grandkids](#)



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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>
- Lifelong Faith Training: <https://www.lifelongfaithtraining.com/>
- Lifelong Faith: <https://www.lifelongfaith.com/>
- Lifelong Faith Studio: <https://www.lifelongfaithstudio.com/>
- Seasons of Adult Faith website: <https://www.seasonsofadultfaith.com>
- The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation:
 - <https://www.lifelongfaith.com/books.html>
 - https://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/seasons_of_faith_journal_special_issue.pdf