



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

#169 - July 1, 2022

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

In **GEMS #167** we looked at the beginning steps to introduce and offer a ministry for maturing adults at St. Mark the Evangelist Parish, Indianapolis, IN. This issue will explore

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

If there's any distinguishing thread between a 49-year-old who seems old and a 94-year-old who seems young, it's the spiritual spin.

The later years are essentially a spiritual journey. Certainly there are physical aspects to it, emotional aspects to it, psychological aspects to it, which all have to be attended to.

But if that spiritual component is missing, then aging becomes really a very dismal thing. Because all we are looking at is the demise of the body.

~ Richard Johnson

The Listening Sessions

Two 90-minute sessions were scheduled; both on the same day: 4:30 pm and 7:00 pm. Light finger foods were available for those who were volunteering at both sessions. Because of the back-to-back scheduling, the decision was made not to have social time at the beginning or conclusion of the sessions. Instead bowls of candy and snacks were provided on each table and a volunteer college student serviced the tables and refilled the drinks.

Participants were seated at tables of eight. Each table had a moderator and a scribe to capture feedback on a flip chart. The facilitator opened the session

and provided an overview of the goals and hopes for the gathering. She also reviewed the questions for discussion and answered any questions the participants had. Throughout the session the facilitator served as a timekeeper to ensure all of the questions were addressed.

Agenda and Notes for Steering Committee and Facilitators

Listening Session: What is it?

An interactive gathering where the participants have been invited from a targeted group of parishioners to participate by answering 4 specific, open-ended questions that are designed to provide guidance to the future planning for the Ministry for Maturing Adults Steering Committee.

Why are we conducting Listening Sessions:

The participants will be able to offer the Steering Committee valuable insights into their wants, needs and expectation for this new ministry. In addition:

- *A database can be created for future involvements in planned events*
- *The participants can help link the Ministry for Maturing Adults to people who are able and willing to help with the future ministry needs.*
- *The participants can volunteer to participate in future events or on MMA subcommittees*
- *This type of format offers people from diverse backgrounds a chance to express their views about key concerns so the ministry can then form action plans specific to those expressed needs, wants and desires of our parishioners.*

Question Overview:

The questions were specifically structured for open-ended answers. The first question is structured so that the participants can immediately express what is most concerning to them. Questions 2 and 3 build into more thought-provoking questions which will help define and give direction to the types of programs and activities that MMA will offer in the future. Questions 4 then gives the participants an opportunity to say whatever they desire in hopes so

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that the participants leave feeling like they have had a chance to give input to and be heard at this gathering.

Each of the following questions will be read/asked by the table facilitator to the participants at their tables. Then each participant will have about two minutes to verbally answer. A total of 15 - 20 minutes will be allotted for answering each question. While the participants are answering the question the Table Assistant will record the answers on a flip chart. TAs should make sure what they write down reflects the participant's answer(s); answers do not have to be in the exact verbatim but should reflect the participant's thoughts.

The answers to question #1 will be written in blue marker, starting at the far left hand margin. Then the answers to question #2 will be written below question #1 and be written in red marker, starting with an indentation.

The Four Questions: (Copies of these questions will be available to participants upon arrival.)

1. List a need or needs that you or others are experiencing at this time that you hope this new ministry can fulfill?
2. What program or activity do you think will help meet the needs you listed above?
3. From the MMA questionnaires we have received continued spiritual growth is the number one request. What does spiritual growth mean to you? Where have you been when you have experienced God? What type of programs or activities would you like to see provided or available to meet your definition of spiritual growth?
4. Looking at what we have summarized on our sheets is there anything you would like to add? After our discussion this evening, what is the most important message you would like to say to this ministry's steering committee.

After one hour, the facilitator will announce that seven minutes will be allowed for tables to prioritize their answers to each question. The facilitator will then invite each table assistant to give a verbal summary of their table's answers in priority order. These answers will be recorded on a flip chart so everyone can see the results from each table.

Table assistants are asked to record the answers to best reflect the answers of the participants. Suggestion: use 1 page per question. Then use colored highlighting to prioritize the answer in the following order:

- Red: Top Priority
- Blue: 2nd Priority
- Green: 3rd Priority

Each page will be retained and compiled to be distributed at future MMA meetings.

Toward the conclusion of the hour, the table facilitator will distribute a form where the participants can check off their "sharing of gifts" or opportunities for service for their own continued involvement in MMA. This is optional and participants should not be forced to fill out the form.

The great thing about getting older is
that you become more mellow.

Things aren't as black and white,
and you become much more tolerant.

You can see the good in things much more easily
rather than getting enraged
as you used to do when you were young.

~ Maeve Binchy

Many Discoveries

Steve Helmich, chair of the Steering Committee, commented that various things were learned through these sessions:

- "People were hungry for spiritual growth opportunities. Many shared they felt the Church was making a big mistake in assuming we mature adults 'had this faith thing figured out.'"
- "We found that many people wanted to be more involved in the life of the parish but no one was asking them."
- "We found that many people are very lonely."
- "We realized there was a tremendous reservoir of knowledge and expertise that was just sitting on the sidelines."

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- “We found there were a number of folks, usually living by themselves, who were living in unsafe conditions and/or needed some help to safely remain in their homes or apartments. I vividly remember a not-so-terribly-old female at my table at one of the listening sessions say, “I just wish someone would call me, once a week, to see if I am okay.” Wow!”
- “We found people wanted to get together with other parishioners of their age - just to be together.”
- “We learned a lot that only strengthened our conviction we were on to something.”
- “I was blown away by how easy it was for people, many who did not really know one another, to come together in these listening sessions and share some pretty deep and heart-felt ‘stuff!’”

begin! The kick-off event was an old-fashioned ice cream social in July. It was a hit!

An invitation was mailed to every mature adult; it was promoted from the pulpit during the liturgy for three weekends. The bulletin insert was lively and inviting.

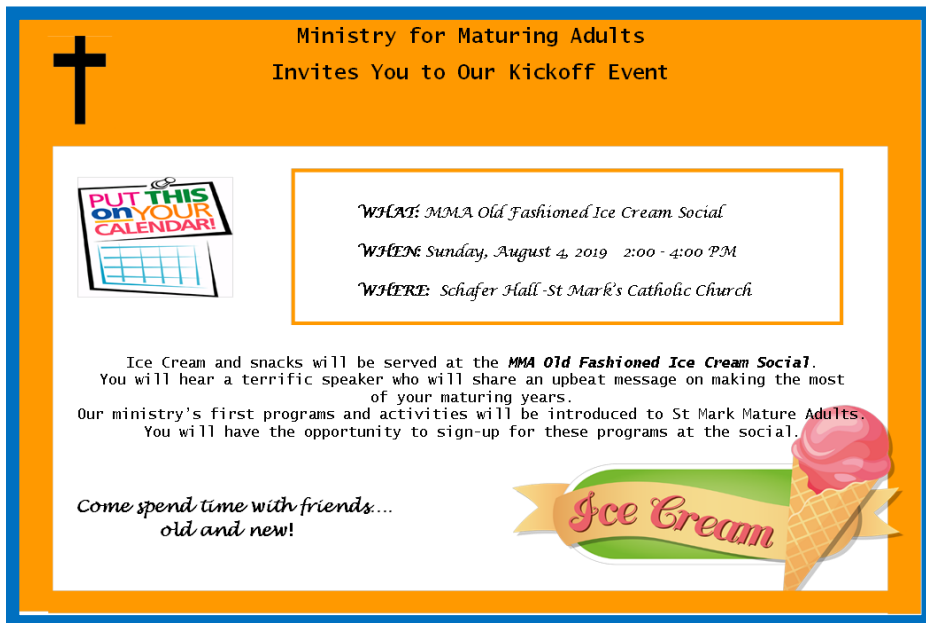
Importantly, the MMA Committee went to the ice cream social with an announcement of the first offerings that were developed as a direct result of input from the Listening Sessions:

- Renewing Connections in Faith (Six sessions to revisit essential aspects of our faith)
- The Spiritual Autobiography Journey
- MMA Book Club
- Understanding Medicare Insurance
- Foster Grandparent Program

Following the pastor’s encouragement to get involved, the various program leaders staffed tables with information about their program and encouraged folks to sign up. The committee was amazed at the number of folks who signed up that day!

Still to Come

GEMS #171 will explore some of their beginning programs and the change in programming and services because of our Covid stay-at-home days.



The flyer features a large black cross in the top left corner. The text reads: "Ministry for Maturing Adults Invites You to Our Kickoff Event". Below this is a graphic of a calendar with the text "PUT THIS on YOUR CALENDAR!". A central box contains the event details: "WHAT: MMA Old Fashioned Ice Cream Social", "WHEN: Sunday, August 4, 2019 2:00 - 4:00 PM", and "WHERE: Schaefer Hall - St Mark's Catholic Church". Below the box, it states: "Ice Cream and snacks will be served at the MMA Old Fashioned Ice Cream Social. You will hear a terrific speaker who will share an upbeat message on making the most of your maturing years. Our ministry's first programs and activities will be introduced to St Mark Mature Adults. You will have the opportunity to sign-up for these programs at the social." At the bottom left, it says "Come spend time with friends... old and new!". At the bottom right, there is a graphic of an ice cream cone with a pink scoop and a banner that says "Ice Cream".

The Kick-Off Event

After the listening sessions and time for the committee to digest and discern the many comments and suggestions, things were in readiness to



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