



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

173 - September 1, 2022

A Best Practice: Parish Advent Workshop (Part I)

Advent is often a prime time to invite families – and all parishioners and people in the neighborhood - to come together at the parish for preparation, for prayer, study and reflection on this holy season. There are many themes, activities and ideas for exploration that could be offered by parishes. This month's **GEMS** issue (and the issue of October 1st) shares an event from one parish, Resurrection Parish, Canton, MI.

Purpose and Goal

In addition to helping people – of all ages – to prepare for Advent and Christmas, the planning committee for this event wanted to offer an evening that welcomed all parishioners and would also provide the opportunity to invite non-parish members to a parish event.

Because the invitation was extended to everyone, there were families with children as young as 4 years old, senior citizens, and everyone in between. Karen Hogan, one of the planners of the event, remarked, "It really was a beautiful mixture of age groups!"

The Plan and Schedule

The evening consisted of:

- A dinner of crock pot dishes
- Large group opening session
- Time to participate in some of the ten prayer stations
- Large group closing session

Some Logistics

Hospitality: People welcomed the participants as they arrived for the evening, inviting everyone to wear a name tag. Others were invited to be "table hosts." Their role was to look for people who seemed left out or not connected during the meal and invite them into the conversation.



The ten prayer stations:

- Parents were invited to stay with younger children (4 year-olds to 3rd graders).
- Older children and couples were welcome to stay together or attend the prayer stations on their own.
- Many families stayed together for at least part of the time but then they would often choose one or two stations they wanted to attend on their own.

Most people were able to attend about five of the ten prayer stations in the time allotted.

Each participant was given a booklet which had:

- instructions for each station
- suggested age groups
- some reflection questions
- a place to journal.

A few of the prayer stations were more "activity-based" and had a staff person to oversee the activities:

- making a family advent wreath
- learning about the Jesse Tree and making an ornament
- making a Jesus Kindness Manger

People moved in and out of the stations without being directed.

- Some stayed at the station briefly
- Some felt led to spend longer at some of the stations

A chime was rung every fifteen minutes to help the participants keep track of the time. The chime was also used to gather everyone for the closing session.

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Meal Gathering
The evening began with

a community meal of "crock pot" dishes. Staff and parish leaders were asked to bring a crockpot dish; the planning committee supplemented the meal with mac 'n' cheese for the children.

The crockpot dishes were labeled to help people feel connected (for instance, Mrs. Carlin's tasty pea soup).

"Conversation Starter Table Tents" were on each table to help engage people during dinner time. Questions were similar to: What was your favorite thing about Christmas as a child? Karen commented, "All this created a lovely spirit of community as we began the evening."

The Large Group Opening Session

The opening began with *The Heart of Advent* video <https://www.sermonspice.com/product/36701/the-heart-of-advent> followed by a brief sharing about the meaning of Advent and the importance of slowing down and making space for God during this season.

A short PowerPoint presentation (2 minutes) then introduced each of the prayer stations and people were invited to visit any of the ten self-led prayer stations set up throughout the building.

Some meditative music played throughout the church as people began their journey. The "Prayer Station Map" was left up on the PowerPoint so people could easily find each of the stations.

The Ten Prayer Stations

Participants received a booklet which provided an explanation and directions for each of ten stations as well as indicating if each station is best for young children, older children, teens or adults. A map in the booklet and signs at each station helped people know where they were going. Some staff wandered the halls to direct people as needed but people seemed to easily transition to each of the stations without much direction.

People were encouraged to visit the stations that spoke to their hearts; some were best for teens and adults while others were perfect for young families. People could stay as long as they wanted at each prayer station.

The following shows what could be found in the booklet for each station.

Advent Wreath Making (All age groups – family project)

What is an Advent Wreath? An Advent Wreath consists of four candles (three purple which signify longing and hope as we wait through the dark days and one rose signifying joy) surrounded by evergreen branches.

One purple candle is lit the first week, two the second week, two purple and one rose the third week, and all four are lit during the last week of Advent. The light of the candles signifies the light of Christ, who came into the world at Christmas.



The circular shape reminds us that God has no beginning and no end. The evergreens are a symbol of everlasting life in Christ.

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The History of the Advent Wreath: The Advent wreath, a feature of many Catholic homes churches during the season of Advent, actually originated in Germany in the 16th century. It was brought to the United States by German immigrants, both Catholic and Protestant, in the 19th century. The Advent Wreath has deeper origins as well, extending back to pre-Christian customs.

Extending it beyond Advent:

Advent ends with Christmas Eve, but there is no reason to put the Advent wreath away for the 12 days of Christmas. Many

people add a large white candle to the center of the wreath and light it, along with the other four, starting at Christmas and going all the way through Epiphany.



It is a good way to remind ourselves that Christ is the reason for the preparations we made during Advent, and it also helps us remember that Christmas doesn't end on Christmas morning after all the presents have been opened.

Advent Wreath Instructions

Step 1: Make sure you have collected all the needed supplies including one metal wreath ring per family, a box of candles (3 purple and 1 rose), greenery, accents (pine cones, floral accents, bells, ribbon), green floral wire, and an Advent 2019 Prayer Booklet.

Step 2: Arrange and secure your greenery around the metal wreath frame using the green floral wire.

Step 3: Decorate your wreath with pine cones, floral accents, bells and/or ribbon and secure them to your wreath ring using the green floral wire.

Step 4: Place the candles into the frame candle holders (you may want to return them to the box so they don't get broken when being transported from church to your home).

Step 5: Select a special place in your home to display your Advent wreath. The Advent wreath helps us keep our thoughts focused on the coming of Christ at Christmas. We are invited to integrate it into our daily activities. One easy way to do this is to make it part of your evening meal.

Step 6: Each night of Advent, light the candle(s) and reflect on the reading from your Advent 2019 Daily Reflections, Practices and Prayer booklet.

Step 7: Bring your completed wreath to the closing tonight for a special blessing.

Journeying through Scripture (4 year-olds to 8th graders)

The Jesse Gift Tree in our Gathering Space gives everyone an opportunity to help people in need. But, there is more to the practice of the Jesse Tree. Back in Medieval times, a Jesse Tree created a visual reminder of God's work in the world since the beginning of creation. For a traditional Jesse Tree, a different Old Testament or Nativity Scripture story is read each day in December and a symbol is taken from that passage and added to the Jesse Tree.

Help Create a Resurrection Parish Jesse Tree

Step 1: Choose a symbol from the following list and read the related Scripture passage.

Step 2: What is this story about? How does this story connect to the story of Jesus? _____

Step 3: Decorate the ornament and add it to our parish Jesse Tree display. This tree will remain on display at the parish to remind us that Jesus' birth is part of a bigger story of God's great love for each of us.

Step 4: Consider making another ornament for your home Christmas tree.

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Step 5: You may use the following list to read a Scripture passage each day of December and reflect as a family how it reveals that God has been at work throughout the history of the world.

Jesse Tree Symbols

December 1: Creation – Genesis 1:1-31, 2:1-4 (sun, moon, stars, earth)

December 2: Adam and Eve – Genesis 3:1-7, 23-24 (apple)

December 3: Noah – Genesis 6:5-8, 13-22; 7:17, 23-24; 8:1, 6-22 (rainbow)

December 4: Abraham – Genesis 15:1-6 (stars in the sky)

December 5: Isaac – Genesis 22:1-14 (a ram)

December 6: Jacob – Genesis 28:10-15 (ladder and angels)

December 7: Joseph – Genesis 37:3-4, 23-28; 41:37-40; 45:4-8 (coat of many colors)

December 8: Moses – Exodus 3:1-10 (burning bush)

December 9: Passover – Exodus 12:1, 3, 6-13 (lamb)

December 10: Ten Commandments – Exodus 19:20; 20:17 (Ten Commandments)

December 11: Jericho – Joshua 6:1-5 (horn)

December 12: Gideon – Judges 6:11-14; 7:1-2, 16-22 (clay jar)

December 13: Samuel Anoints Saul as King – 1 Samuel 10:1; 12:13-15 (crown)

December 14: David – 1 Samuel 16 (harp)

December 15: Elijah – 1 Kings 18:1-3a, 19-46 (fire on an altar)

December 16: God's Protection – 2 Kings 19:14-19, 32-34 (tent)

December 17: Nehemiah: Nehemiah 1:1; 2:1-6, 17-18 (city walls)

December 18: Isaiah – Isaiah 6:1-8 (burning ember)

December 19: Promised Messiah – Isaiah 11:1-9 (stump of Jesse)

December 20: Jeremiah – Jeremiah 7:1-7 (tears)

December 21: Joseph – Matthew 1:18-25 (hammer)

December 22: Mary – Luke 1:26-38 (lily)

December 23: Elizabeth and Mary – Luke 1:39-45 (a baby)

December 24: John the Baptist – Luke 3:1-6 (shell for baptisms)

December 25: Jesus – Luke 2:1-20 (Jesus in the manger)

Jesus Kindness Mangers (4 year olds – 3rd graders)

Children can decorate a manger to prepare for Jesus' coming. Each time your child does an act of kindness for others they may put a bit of cotton in the manger. Each little act will make a nice soft bed for the baby on Christmas morning. By their good deeds, they are making the Christ Child more comfortable and welcome in their home.

Table tents on each table gave further directions:

- The first panel: Choose a brown manger. Use crayons, markers, and stickers to decorate the manger. Fill a sandwich bag with a cup full of cotton balls. Place a cotton ball in the manger each time you show God's love. Create a soft, welcoming place for Jesus."
- The second panel had discussion questions for the families while they worked on the mangers:
 - Jesus wants us to show love to the people around us. He tells us to love one another as he has loved you. Discuss as a family: How has God shown love to you and your family? How has your child/your parent shown love to you lately?
 - How could you show love this Advent? How could you be kind to others?"



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- The third side of the table tent contained a prayer: Consider saying this prayer together tonight:

Jesus, help us to remember the gift of Your love in our lives. May we remember to be kind to others this Advent so you will feel welcomed into our hearts and our homes this Christmas. Amen.

Parents, you can encourage your children by “catching” them using kind words and doing kind acts. Invite them to add a bit of cotton and take time each week to notice how the manger is getting softer and Jesus is feeling more welcome in your home. Consider sharing this or a similar prayer with your children on Christmas morning:

Jesus, we are filled with joy this Christmas morning. May you feel welcomed because of the love we share. May we recognize your presence in each person in this family. We

invite you to help us show your love to the world. We love you, Jesus!



Still to come

Next month's issue will continue to provide an overview of the explanations and directions which were found in the participants' booklet for each of the stations.



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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