



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

#191 - June 1, 2023

After the Pandemic: What Have We Learned? Where do We Go?

Some people would say that we're not beyond the pandemic stage of Covid. Hopefully, we're beyond – and will never return to – the days of 2020.

Other people might say: why are we talking about this? We've already returned to the way it was before 2020.

In reality, often we don't realize what we've learned until there's a significant separation from it:

- “It's so difficult, isn't it? To see what's going on when you're in the absolute middle of something? It's only with hindsight we can see things for what they are.” ~ S.J. Watson, *Before I Go to Sleep*
- “In any case, while it is all very well to talk of 'turning points', one can surely only recognize such moments in retrospect.” ~ Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day*
- “We go through the present blindfolded... Only later, when the blindfold is removed and we examine the past, do we realize what we've been through and understand what it means.” ~ Milan Kundera
- “Experience without reflection is useless. The constant question of life must be, ‘What did I learn from this’?” ~ Joan Chittister
- “We do not learn from experience; we learn from reflecting on experience.” ~ John Dewey

Therefore, it's not too late to reflect on our experiences during the pandemic, always asking:

- What happened? Why did it happen like that?
- What did we learn?
- When does it tell us about going forward?

In this issue we'll look at two questions:

- What did you learn/experience (about adults, their growth in faith and need for belonging) during the time of Covid that needs to continue? That needs to change?
- What adult faith formation opportunity/process/procedure/program continued during the pandemic – or was begun – that was helpful for people/successful?

In next month's issue we'll explore two additional questions.

“Do not try to call them back to where they were,
and do not try to call them to where you are,
as beautiful as that place might seem to you.
You must have the courage to go with them
to a place that neither you nor they
have ever been before.”

~Vincent J. Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered*
(Orbis Books)

What did you learn/experience (about adults, their growth in faith and need for belonging) during the time of Covid that needs to continue? That needs to change?

As you read the ideas below, what did you learn/experience? What have you changed?

Did you do something during Covid that needs to continue?

- My experience showed that people were hungry to gather together to learn. I had the largest group interested in my Fall Scripture study to date. I offered in-person study three different times during the week

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(to ensure that no group was too big and we had distance between tables). Several people opted to study from home on their own. The thing that encouraged me was the number of couples in attendance. Usually it is predominately women. (*Jillian Peck, Holy Spirit Parish, Highland, MI*)

- Adults need to stay connected, even if it's virtual. We have been offering bible studies and prayer experiences via zoom and continue to have a great participation. We've been able to include people from other areas (Texas, Florida, Indiana, and more) and people who don't like to drive after dark are able to participate. We will continue to offer zoom options for all of our opportunities. (*Teri Burns, St Robert of Newminster Church, Ada, MI*)
- One surprise was that groups that already had a strong bond fared really well in using remote meeting platforms (like Zoom). We had groups that weren't doing well with in-person meetings that were constrained by Covid protocols, largely due to an inability for some members to hear what was being said behind masks. Individuals who were sharing revelatory and deeply private things were forced to, essentially, yell as they shared, forcing recognition that in-person meetings weren't working for those groups. Given the opportunity to connect remotely, even as some individuals were initially hesitant, the participants were thrilled to have the ability to see everyone's full faces and to hear what everyone was sharing. (*Peggy Casing, St. Mary of the Hills, Rochester Hills, MI*)
- I found that in the two men I worked with on the sacraments of initiation the "unsettled" year of 2020 got them to thinking about questions of value and permanence which prompted them to pick up threads from their earlier lives which led them back to the church. This unsettlement led them to questions of meaning and "sense-making" that the other sectors of their lives just weren't addressing. I think that the faith as a "sense-making" exercise/reality is something that we need to keep the focus on going forward. The constant deep "fluidity" of nearly every aspect of life and culture isn't truthful or workable for many. Offering them the alternative is an act of charity. The icon of Christ and his followers as embodied self-sacrificing love

as the foundation of it all resonates. We need to change whatever hides that.

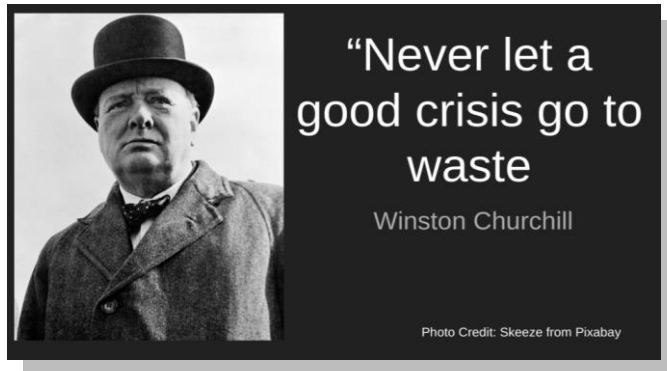
Among the members of my adult bible study many offered to the group that their faith was actually stronger as a result of having to deal with the pandemic and the separation, and they really appreciated the ability to connect with their friends and fellow parish community folk at our online weekly sessions. (We convened three six-week sessions during the nine months of lock down.) The size of the online sessions ran from 20-30 folks. All said that they missed in-person contact and would be glad to get back to it as soon as safety permits, but that online did keep people together in the meantime. (*Deacon Michael Ward, Saint Josephine Bakhita Parish, Rocky Hill, CT*)



- The Zoom platform works unbelievably well for me and for the seniors in my parish. *Lectio Divina*, book discussions, Bible study, and spiritual direction have thrived in this format. However, people who Zoom all day for work were definitely not interested in this. (*Anne Hobbein, Immaculate Conception Parish, Elmhurst, IL*)

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- I learned that we are much more creative than we ever imagined! The number of online programs and worship services that sprung up, almost instantly, was both impressive and quite amazing. We found ways to bring people together and connect with one another via all the social media channels and it worked! People have been meeting weekly for Scripture studies, RCIA, Advent and Lenten Series and various other events. We've met to plan online worship with committees and even participated in a virtual choir. All of these experiences have been wonderful ways to stay together and connect with those who might otherwise be quite isolated. *(Nancy Mason Bordley, Troy, MI)*
- I think the adults were craving community. We have been vigilant in keeping the building sanitized, socially distant and wearing masks. *(Jillian Peck, Holy Spirit Parish, Highland, MI)*



What adult faith formation opportunity/process/procedure/program continued during the pandemic – or was begun – that was helpful for people/successful?

As you read the ideas below, did you do something similar during Covid?

**If not, what would have happened if you did?
Would one of these ideas be helpful for you now?**

- During the pandemic, I became part of two Zoom groups with colleagues from all over the country. These are people I might normally see about once a year...if that often. We are now using technology to get to know one another better by sharing stories and/or sharing our responses to articles or podcasts. One of the groups is actually a *Lectio Divina* group, and the other is a group that watches a podcast or reads an article and then discusses it. The *Lectio group* is meeting monthly and the other group meets every other month. Both are very enriching. *(Bill Miller, Cleveland, OH)*
- A bonus of the pandemic: adult faith formation will be available at any time. You can click in to archived webinars and opportunities at any time. People are concerned that if you do things online, people won't come back. Whatever we do now will always be a hybrid. I can't imagine not always offering a livestreaming of the liturgies. Many people want to participate but can't physically. *(Fr. Bob Stagg, Church of the Presentation, Upper Saddle River, NJ)*
- As the weather allowed, we offered outdoor opportunities. Sitting outside for a conversation is wonderful! We started a weekly virtual Rosary that will likely continue indefinitely. We are utilizing video communications - sharing links from our parish Facebook and YouTube accounts - to encourage and stay connected with parishioners. *(Teri Burns, St Robert of Newminster Church, Ada, MI)*
- Our racial justice committee was already doing its JustFaith program by zoom just prior to the pandemic. This gave us some good experience that we were able to utilize as we prepared an (almost) monthly racial justice series by Zoom. We have shifted back to some in-person events but I do not see us abandoning the use of Zoom. This virtual platform has allowed us to bring in a variety of people who cannot or will not travel to events.

When we held our first listening session on race/racism, it was attended by our Bishop and Bishop Shelton Fabre, Chair of the USCCB Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism. From there we held some civil dialogues and a JustMatters group. After the George Floyd

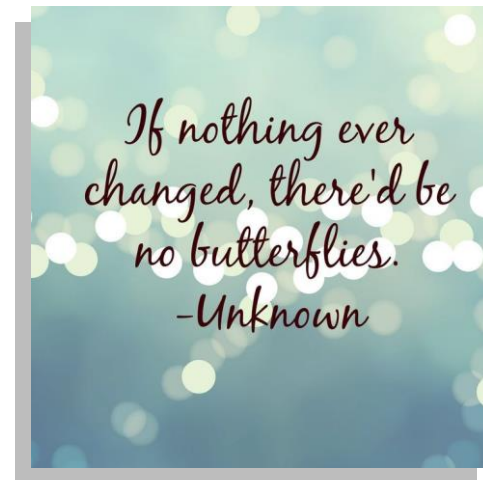
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killing we decided to hold an initial session followed by a series of (almost) monthly dialogues. We try to utilize a format of prayer, presentation on a specific theme, breakout rooms, recap and closing prayer. <https://www.dosp.org/racialharmony/> (Sabrina Burton Schultz, St. Petersburg, FL)

- We began the series, "Restored, Stories of Encounter" (<https://cedarhouse.co/restored-new-edition/>) a six-part documentary series on individuals who had radical encounters with Christ and went on to make a real difference in the world. This series provided vivid and deeply human role models for all who desire life in Christ. (Jillian Peck, Holy Spirit Parish, Highland, MI)
- During the pandemic I accompanied three individuals (2 for Baptism and 1 for Confirmation) in completing their sacraments of initiation. This was done all online in the evenings from their homes. Largely this was one on one conversations based on reading/viewing and preparation done before hand. My sense is that this worked very well indeed, and the outcomes were quite positive. I have also moved Baptism Preparation at the parish to the same mode. This one-on-one "face to face" format from the comfort of their homes seems much more intimate for us and convenient for them as there is no need for them, to get a sitter. I think that the couples like the intimate and undivided attention that I can give them and feel appreciative that the "Church came to them" rather than vice-versa. My sense is that at least for the time being baptism preparation will stay online even after the pandemic subsides. It just worked better for all and meets the young people in a mode they are used to and comfortable with. (Deacon Michael Ward, Saint Josephine Bakhita Parish, Rocky Hill, CT)
- Gardening: At a time when it's healthier to be outdoors, at a time when we've rediscovered the power of being in nature, help adults pay attention to the spirituality of gardening. See **GEMS** #86-88.
- What worked well was one of my Bible studies. Our main church bought an "Owl" setup so we could Zoom our sessions. This group was more willing to speak. The "Owl" picks up the person who is

speaking either online or in the room and highlights that person on the screen. Our study was very successful. Even though I plan to have in person studies in the fall, I still will use the owl because many of our people who attend leave for the south in the winter. This is a way that they can continue with the study. I hadn't thought of that before COVID. It wouldn't work well with just a single computer in doing a group both in person and online together.

I think when one gets accustomed to using Zoom and being able to show documents, PowerPoints, videos or other visual aids, online groups are a way to reach even more people than before. I see this as a positive effect of the shutdowns of the past years. (Denise Sinke, Holy Childhood of Jesus Catholic Church, Alanson, MI)



- When we realized that we wouldn't be able to start in-person classes again in the fall of 2021, our education team looked for a new way to do education. We tried Playlists. We choose a topic each month and design Playlists for children, youth, and adults. We post them on our Faith Formation Website. (<https://dclcfathformation.org/adult-playlists/>)

The Faith Formation Website is a project that grew out of a couple of Lifelong Learning Classes I took in 2018 & 2019. We were grateful we had the website in place when 2020 hit.

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We see a spike in traffic to the site on the day the playlists post. Some folks work their way through the whole list during one sitting and then have that topic in their minds the rest of the month. Others do a couple of the elements a week until they work their way through the list.

Our youth director is using the list one night a month with the junior high group and one night a month with the high school group. Our children's director is including a link to the playlist in her monthly communication to families. Our pastors sometimes reference the lists during their sermons. (*Denise McClellan, Desert Cross Lutheran Church, 8600 S. McClintock Dr., Tempe, AZ*)

- A Festival of Praise was planned for the feast of Pentecost which included several outdoor learning stations with activities and crafts prior to joining under a big tent to worship. The stations were designed for families: activities teaching the Fruits, Gifts and Power of the Holy Spirit. (*Jillian Peck, Holy Spirit Parish, Highland, MI*)
- Our parish Lenten mission successfully took place in person with the added bonus of several hundred people following on YouTube. We were the only parish in the deanery to sponsor a Lenten mission. The YouTube invitation went out to the other 14 parishes. Only our parishioners were eligible to register for a seat in church. (*Anne Hobbein, Immaculate Conception Parish, Elmhurst, IL*)



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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