



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

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A Best Practice: A Cup of Coffee and a Conversation

As Jane Regan, one of our country's leaders in adult faith formation, has reminded us many times, "Adults learn best when they are in conversation with other adults about things that matter." (*Toward an Adult Church: A Vision of Faith Formation* by Jane Regan. Loyola Press, 2002, pages 162 and 187)

In October of 2015, marking the 50th anniversary of the Synod of Bishops, Pope Francis outlined his vision for a church that is "synodal" at every level, with everyone listening to each other, learning from each other and taking responsibility for proclaiming the Gospel.

Many parishes and (arch)dioceses throughout the world are striving to be a synodal church, especially during this Jubilee Year of Hope.

One parish that has initiated a rather simple, but far-reaching plan is Immaculate Conception Church, Hampton, VA.

How It Began

As she begins to tell us about their plans, Jean Musto Hawley, M.Th., M.Ed., Director of Religious Education, asks some thought-provoking questions:

- "Ever wonder about where sharing a cup of coffee with someone could lead?"
- Do we intentionally make the time in our lives to experience these opportunities?"
- Are we too rushed or trapped within the confines of our schedules and calendar to make room for such a small gift for one another and for ourselves?"

As part of their Jubilee celebration, the parish is holding monthly gatherings to study and discuss how the Church can be "Pilgrims of Hope" to the world.

It all began as Jean Musto Hawley collaborated with [Mark Hoggard](#), Pastoral Associate, for an intentional community gathering that took place in mid-January 2025.



This "1000 Cups of Coffee" gathering was the first of many purposeful efforts within the parish to recognize and unpack the gift of a cup of coffee and meaningful conversation among the People of God.

Why?

Why did they choose to plan this now in 2025? This initiative is one part of their 2025 parish-wide reflection as "Pilgrims of Hope," a first step in being a "hope-happens-here" parish, inviting parishioners to faith-sharing.



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The Inspiration

The “1000 Cups of Coffee” idea was inspired by the Diocese of Davenport’s “58,000 Cups of Coffee” initiative involving diocesan Catholics as part of local preparations for the church’s 2023 world Synod of Bishops on synodality. As Xavière Missionary Sister Nathalie Becquart, who serves as undersecretary of the Synod of Bishops has said, “Synodality starts with coffee.”

(In February 2025, the Diocese of Davenport, contacted Jean to see how things had gone for them. Plans might be underway for the Davenport diocese and Immaculate Conception Church in Virginia to work collaboratively going forward.)

The Gathering

Over the course of one weekend, parishioners were invited to a session following two of three of their regularly scheduled liturgies. Jean shares, “As an active Fair Trade/Equal Exchange community, we had the coffee part down pat! We added some delicious food-bites to accompany the coffee and then the exciting wonder of the encounter commenced.”

[Debbie Stollery](#), a well-known, author, consultant, and co-founder of the Pentecost Vigil Project, led over 100 adults in two sessions on the [“Anatomy of Hope”](#). Stollery said, “Hope is hard to grab onto. You think you know what it is until you are asked to answer the question: What exactly is hope?” She quoted Romans 5:5, which reminds us that “Hope does not disappoint,” but who among us,” she asked, “has not at some point had their hopes dashed on the rocks?”



Stollery proposed that “Hope is not an emotion. Hope is an intentional, practical process that can help us deal with hardship, struggle, suffering, doubt and fear. As Pope Francis has said,” she continued, “hope does not disappoint either the givers or the receivers.”

Stollery observed that the first paragraph of *Gaudium et Spes, The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, promulgated in 1965, provides a landmark for Pilgrims of Hope: “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the

anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.”

How can we become this Spirit-guided Church on the earth? “Pope Francis has declared the way,” she said: “To become a synodal Church in the Third Millennium. This, the Pope has said, IS the way the Church will be the Church...Pilgrims of Hope build a synodal Church that lives communion based on the participation and co-responsibility of all the faithful as members of a People of God in a permanent state of conversion and reform. We give of ourselves to generate hope: fight despair and darkness, relieve oppression, set captives free...to be Jesus active in the world today...to become a Church of hope-bearers in our hope-starved world.”

Stollery outlined practical ways that Pope Francis set out in *Spes Non Confundit*, his proclamation of Jubilee 2025, reminding us that a Jubilee year is the time for the whole Church to restore, repent and rejoice: to set captives free from all that oppresses, to allow God to set us free from the things that keep us from being close to the Lord, and above all to show the world our joy!

“How will we do that?” she asked, “By making connections first here, connections grounded in deep respect, curiosity about the Spirit’s voice emerging from one another, and trust that the Spirit will lift out what needs attention. And you will do it with trust that the Spirit will give the gifts needed to continue to give and receive hope. The Spirit will guide your hearts and hands...to be a people in a community who can proclaim HOPE HAPPENS HERE!”

The People’s Response

After listening closely to Debbie’s inspiring presentation, the parishioners then used their coffee coasters and did a deep dive into two basic questions with our tablemate friends:

- What fills your heart about our Church?
- What breaks your heart about our Church?



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Jean explains, “The coffee coasters we designed provided a scan code for folks to use to electronically record their responses. Some preferred the tried-and-true method of pen and paper, and so we provided hard-copies for them to record thoughts in that manner as well.”



The Results

Jean enthusiastically reported, “The conversations that unfolded were extraordinary! The themes we have been able to extract from the responses have proven quite insightful regarding:

- what we celebrate
- what we are plagued with
- what we smile about
- what we cry about

and everything in between pertaining to being Church (locally and universally):

- the shortage of and the formation of clergy
- the wonderful, welcoming community of our parish
- the distinct choice of some pockets of hierarchy to ignore Vatican II
- the perplexing desire to return to a pre-Vatican II Church
- the beautiful celebration of sacraments with active participation of adults and children alike
- the “missing” high school teens and college-age young adults
- cultural and social diversity and inclusivity
- the beloved teachings of Pope Francis
- the fear of shifts toward clericalism and misogyny by some
- an intentional effort toward Care for Creation
- the dismissed or misunderstood role of laity (particularly women) in the Church
- the dreams and hopes of a Synodal Church!”

What’s next?

Jean indicated that this is not the end! “We made it known that we have begun the intentional nature of coffee and conversation within our parish so now it is time to take this same activity outside of the parish and have conversations with others...

- those in our families
- our neighbors
- our friends
- those we used to see at the parish and are no longer attending
- those who are not practicing but still willing to reflect upon what Church really is in their life.

Additionally, we have begun looking more closely at the Final Document of the Synod on Synodality and what it means to “cast our nets” (Recall my previous blog, [On the Road to Implementing Synodality: Casting the Net!](#)). “The meaning and the dimension of synodality includes a path of spiritual renewal and structural reform that enables the Church to be more participatory and missionary so that it can walk with every man and woman, radiating the light of Christ” (#28).

In considering that necessary spiritual renewal and structural reform, intentionality leads our pathways with listening, praying, meditating, dialoguing, accompanying, discerning, deciding, and acting (#29). We have formulated a year of monthly gatherings/presentations that focus upon who we are as Pilgrims of Hope embracing Vatican II at 60. And the dreams of who we can BE as Church continue onward...”

The parishioners were invited to respond with their answers to the two sharing questions (both within the parish and those they took outside of the parish to talk with others) by mid-February. Jean indicates that after they extracted the overlying themes, they will then host another “Coffee and Conversation” to focus on the specific themes discovered.

Parishioners’ Responses to the Gathering

A few of the many, many comments from those gathered:

- “I sat with folks I didn't even know and now I feel so much more connected.”
- “At first I was hesitant to share, but when I heard others' responses, I felt more at ease.”

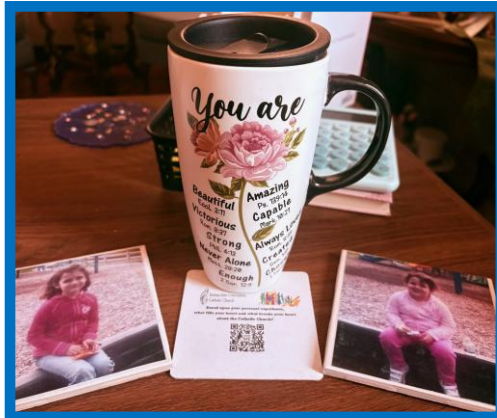
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- "We really need to delve into these topics more closely. We cannot always assume what fills our individual heart fills someone else's heart, ya know?"
- "I love hearing the point of view of others and their experiences that shaped their hearts about the Church!"
- "We need to keep doing this, even if it's virtual."
- "There is so much to truly think about when it comes to being Church in the world."

A Personal Reflection

Jean shared, "You may also notice in this photo the two coffee coasters of my daughters when they and I were much younger. Personally, this was a season of my own life when I was a single mother walking an uncertain pathway:

- a season where I was on "auto-pilot," if you will
- a season of survival and doing what was necessary for the safety and well-being of my daughters
- a season where I was dismissive of my own Church efforts yet made strides to bring Church to my girls
- a season of uncertainty and worry
- a season of personal, unintentional "brokenness."



However, today I view this photo in a different light.

- There is joyful hope in knowing that my now 19-year-old and 17-year-old daughters are on a path of discovery and learning as lovely young Christian women.

- There is a dream in my heart of what our Catholic Church could be for my daughters and for all of us if we embrace synodal efforts intentionally, one-step-at-a-time.
- There is encouragement in knowing that my ongoing academic journey and ministry has led to much learning and understanding about the movement of the Holy Spirit and the importance of its "nudges" in our lives despite uncertainty.

What Will You Do?

There is beauty, power and gift in the simplicity of a cup of coffee and conversation that can lead to so many amazing possibilities. What will you and your parish/(arch)diocese do to invite your people to conversation, to faith-sharing, to the living of (and acting for) hope?

(Jean Musto Hawley said if any parish/diocese wants to brainstorm for their own event, she would be happy to accompany them. Feel free to contact her at jeanhawley@icchampton.org.)



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