



# GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

*from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study*

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## A Best Practice: Communities of Like Interest

Do we approach adult faith formation with the conviction that “One size fits all?”

If we look at the business world for a moment: Nearly a century ago Henry Ford invented the famous “assembly line” that is credited with putting Detroit and the world in the “Mass Production” business. When he introduced the “Model T,” the marketing message was essentially, “*You can have any color you want as long as it is black.*”

Donald Tapscott, the author of several books on today’s digital world, uses a different term to describe what drives business today: mass customization. In effect, “you can have whatever you want customized to your wishes.”

## What does this mean for adult faith formation?

Some parishes approach adult faith formation with a “one size fits all” mentality. The reality is that adults will be interested in (and need) different things, different aspects of their faith life flowing from their personal faith development and expression.

“An approach of ‘corned beef and hash for everyone’ (which is tantamount to ‘We don’t care what you need, this is what you get because this is what we’ve got’) and programs based simply on what the religious educator or pastor wants to teach are too capricious.” (McKenzie and Harton in *The Religious Education of Adults*)

All we have to do is look at our parishes and realize the diversity and the reality that different groups need different things

- Parents of young children need something different than empty nesters
- Those who have just lost a job have unique needs
- People who are new in the faith need something different than those who have been deeply practicing the faith for years

There is much anecdotal evidence that a Scripture group for business men will attract more men than a generic Scripture study program.

Certainly, there are times when “mixed groups” are important – we learn from the wisdom and experiences of each other.

A product for everyone rarely reaches anyone.

~ Seth Godin  
in *Small Is the New Big: and 183 Other Riffs, Rants and Remarkable Business Ideas*

Adult faith formation, then, can be especially fruitful when people gather around a shared interest, life stage, or passion, because it creates natural bonds and opens space for deeper conversations about faith.

## Some adult faith formation ideas organized around common needs and shared interests:

### *Life Stage Focused*

- Young adult faith communities addressing career, relationships, and purpose
- Midlife spiritual renewal groups exploring transitions and meaning
- Retirement preparation that includes spiritual dimensions
- Grief and loss support with faith perspectives
- New member integration programs

### *Interest-Based Communities*

- Faith and science discussions for those in technical fields
- Social justice action groups combining advocacy with spiritual formation
- Outdoor ministry for nature lovers (hiking, gardening, camping)
- Faith and finance workshops on stewardship and ethical living
- Arts and faith communities for creative individuals

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## ***Flexible Formats***

- Online discussion groups for busy schedules or mobility issues
- Weekend intensives or retreats for deeper exploration
- Lunch-and-learn sessions for working professionals
- Seasonal programs that align with liturgical calendar or life rhythms

## ***For Adults Navigating Life Transitions***

- Career change discernment groups exploring calling and purpose
- Divorce recovery circles combining healing with spiritual growth
- Health challenges support groups integrating faith and wellness
- Moving/relocation groups for those adjusting to new communities
- Financial stress support combining practical resources with spiritual perspectives

## ***For Parents with Shared Challenges***

- Parents of teenagers discussing faith transmission and boundaries
- Special needs parenting groups exploring grace, advocacy, and community
- Single parents connecting around time management and spiritual practices
- Parents of adult children learning to release and trust
- Adoptive/foster families sharing unique faith journeys

## ***For Professionals with Common Interests***

- Healthcare workers exploring compassion, ethics, and burnout prevention
- Educators discussing vocation, student care, and work-life balance
- Business professionals examining integrity, leadership, and stewardship
- First responders addressing trauma, service, and spiritual resilience
- Retired professionals redirecting skills toward meaningful service

## ***For Those with Shared Spiritual Interests***

- Contemplatives drawn to silence, meditation, and mystical traditions
- Social activists combining justice work with spiritual formation
- Seekers exploring interfaith dialogue and religious diversity

## ***For Common Life Circumstances***

- Empty nesters rediscovering identity and purpose
- Caregivers balancing service to others with self-care
- New community members seeking belonging and connection
- Those recovering from religious trauma or spiritual wounds
- Introverts preferring smaller, deeper spiritual conversations

The shoe that fits one person pinches another;  
there is no recipe for living that suits all cases.

~ Carl Jung

## ***Program Ideas Based on Life Stages and Interests***

***For Young Adults (20s-30s):*** These individuals are often grappling with career choices, relationships, and establishing independence. Faith formation can be highly interactive and address topics like work-life balance, navigating dating and marriage through a faith lens, and finding one's purpose. Small groups focused on Scripture and spirituality in a casual setting, like a coffee shop or pub, can be effective. Retreats centered on personal identity and vocational discernment are also highly appealing to this group.

***For Midlife Adults (40s-50s):*** These adults often juggle parenting, caring for aging parents, and demanding careers. Programs can provide support and community for these busy individuals. Consider workshops on parenting with faith, managing stress through prayer, and a study on how to find God in everyday life. Service-based activities like volunteering for Habitat for Humanity or a local food pantry can also be powerful faith formation opportunities, as they connect faith to action.

***For Mature Adults (50s-70s+):*** Many in this group are retired or semi-retired and have more time for spiritual reflection. They are often interested in a deeper, more intellectual understanding of their faith. A seminar-style Scripture study on a specific book of Scripture, a series on the history of the church, or a book club discussing theological texts can be well-received. Trips and pilgrimages can also be a meaningful way for this group to connect with their faith.

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Our adult faith formation ministry must engage  
the particular needs and interests  
of the adults in each local community.

~ *Our Hearts Were Burning within Us*

## Let's Imagine What a Year-Long Plan for Adult Faith Formation Might Look Like

### ***Fall (September–November) – Gathering & Rootedness***

- Bible & Brews (Young Adults & Midlife Adults): Monthly evening Scripture study at a local coffeehouse or brewery.
- Faith & Family (Parents' Group): 6-week series on "Praying with Your Children" during religious education time.
- Justice & Mercy Circle (Social Concerns Group): Scripture and Catholic Social Teaching series on poverty and migration, paired with a parish service project.
- Sacred Art & Faith (Creative Group): Workshop exploring icons and how they invite prayer.

### ***Advent & Christmas (December–January) – Waiting & Hospitality***

- Faith & Film (Open to All): Screening of a Christmas-themed film with reflection questions.
- Prayer Practices Workshop (Spiritual Seekers): Guided Advent contemplative practices such as Lectio Divina, Ignatian imaginative prayer, centering prayer.
- Hospitality & Food (Parish Kitchen Group): Baking cookies for homebound parishioners, with reflection on Eucharistic hospitality.

### ***Winter (February–March) – Deepening & Renewal***

- Book & Faith Club (Readers): Read and discuss a spiritual classic (e.g., *The Return of the Prodigal Son* by Henri Nouwen).
- Faith & Healthcare (Profession-Based): Small group for medical professionals to discuss ethics and spirituality of care.
- Lenten Small Groups (Parish-Wide): Themed series on forgiveness, mercy, or discipleship.
- Walking with the Saints (History/Spirituality Enthusiasts): 4-week evening series on saints' lives as models of discipleship.

### ***Easter Season (April–May) – Joy & New Life***

- Spirituality of Gardening (Nature Enthusiasts): Faith reflections while working in parish or home gardens.
- Faith & Music Night (Musicians & Music Lovers): Evening of prayer and sharing stories of how music deepens faith.
- Faith at Work (Professionals): Evening discussion series on integrating faith into workplace decisions.

### ***Summer (June–August) – Pilgrimage & Community***

- Outdoor Prayer Walks (All Ages): Labyrinth walks, rosary hikes, or evening prayer in a park.
- Faith & Film (Young Adults/Intergenerational): Outdoor summer film series with short faith discussions.
- Service + Reflection Retreat Day (Families & Adults): Day of service followed by guided reflection on the Gospel call to serve.
- Digital Faith Series (Tech Enthusiasts): Online sessions on "Living Faith in a Digital World."

Broad is bland; specific is magnetic.

~ A Marketing Principle

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You might be interested in:

- [What are we Providing in Adult Faith Formation?](#)
- [“What Are We Providing” seen through the lens of Church Membership/Discipleship](#)
- [“What Are We Providing” seen through the lens of Faith Development](#)
- [“What Are We Providing” seen through the lens of the Everyday Life Needs of Today’s Adults](#)
- [Seen through the six content areas in \*Our Hearts Were Burning within Us\*: Knowledge of the Faith](#)
- [Seen through the six content areas in \*Our Hearts Were Burning within Us\*: Liturgical Life](#)
- [Seen through the six content areas in \*Our Hearts Were Burning within Us\*: Moral Formation](#)
- [Seen through the six content areas in \*Our Hearts Were Burning within Us\*: Prayer](#)
- [Seen through the six content areas in \*Our Hearts Were Burning within Us\*: Community Life](#)
- [Seen through the six content areas in \*Our Hearts Were Burning within Us\*: Missionary Spirit](#)
- [What Are We Providing in Adult Faith Formation: Postlude Reflections](#)



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Past issues of **GEMS** are archived at [www.janetschaeffler.com](http://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>
- *Guided by the Directory for Catechesis: Transforming the Vision and Practice of Parish Catechesis:*  
<https://twentythirdpublications.com/products/guided-by-the-directory-for-catechesis>
- Lifelong Faith Training: <https://www.lifelongfaithtraining.com/>
- Lifelong Faith: <https://www.lifelongfaith.com/>
- Seasons of Adult Faith website: <http://adultfaith.weebly.com/>
- The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation:  
[https://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/seasons\\_of\\_aff\\_-\\_journal\\_special\\_issue.pdf](https://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/seasons_of_aff_-_journal_special_issue.pdf)