



# GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

*from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study*

#259 - April 1, 2026

## A Best Practice: In the Doing is the Learning

There are so many maxims about faith formation today, especially adult faith formation:

- "Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn." – often attributed to Benjamin Franklin.
- "What I hear, I forget. What I see, I remember. What I do, I understand." – Confucius (or a proverb inspired by his teachings).
- "The only source of knowledge is experience." – Albert Einstein.
- "Knowledge that is not put into practice is like food that is not digested." – Ancient proverb.
- "Faith is caught more than it is taught." – a common pastoral saying, pointing to witness and lived example.
- "Disciples are formed not just in the classroom, but in the streets, the home, and the parish."
- "We do not think ourselves into new ways of living; we live ourselves into new ways of thinking." – attributed to Richard Rohr.
- "Formation happens when the head, heart, and hands are engaged together."
- "Faith deepens in service, matures in prayer, and comes alive in community."
- "Adult faith formation... must help believers to actualize the Gospel in their daily lives." (Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us, #68)
- "Faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead." – James 2:17
- "What does love look like? It has the hands to help others, the feet to hasten to the poor and needy, the eyes to see misery and want... That is what love looks like." (St. Augustine)
- "A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented." (Deus Caritas Est {Benedict XVI, 2005} #14)
- "The lay faithful grow in holiness precisely through their service in charity." (Christifideles Laici {Pope John Paul II, 1988}, no. 17)
- "Service on behalf of the Gospel is a constitutive dimension of adult faith formation." (Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us, #44)

**We are formed and grow in faith when we are engaged in doing. At the same time, faith formation prepares us, calls us, enables us, and challenges us to do, to serve.**



This issue of **GEMS** tells the marvelous story of the The Francis Project: Living Shoreline at Immaculate Conception Parish in Hampton, VA. ([https://youtu.be/A6BJVwZqUS4?si=b4TcrDsLagk\\_Yn4H1](https://youtu.be/A6BJVwZqUS4?si=b4TcrDsLagk_Yn4H1))

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## What is the Parish's Foundation regarding the Interrelationship between Faith and Service?

Over the course of the past seven years, Immaculate Conception Parish has been intentional that faith and service are not "separate entities." Rather, service is naturally woven into the fiber of who they are as Christians in the gift of God's creation today and always.

This video (<https://youtu.be/afu8v6enmr4?si=MtDQZ2PriqWfIDyo>) provides an overview of the methodology behind the parish's faith and service formation. That sets the stage for them.

- The homilies at the liturgies always call the parishioners to reflect and consider how faith shapes what they do in the world and how the do it.
- Then as the catechetical years progress, they focus on gatherings, such as their G.I.F.T. (Generations In Faith Together), their whole-community intergenerational catechesis, that draws upon things such as
  - "Care for Creation"
  - "Rights and Responsibilities"
  - "Respect for Human Dignity", etc.



These opportunities are for the whole parish (children through seasoned adults) to connect and delve into such topics and realize that faith and service are a "package deal," as opposed to separate entities.



- One example of the parish's caring service can be seen in Fair Trade/Equal Exchange. In addition to selling and promoting the products regularly and consistently (2nd and 4th weekends of each month), the parish is sending their lead volunteers to the Dominican Republic on a trip that will allow them to visit the cocoa plant farmers and families, interact and learn with Equal Exchange, and share the parish's experiences as well.



The parish's pastoral associate, Mark Hoggard, writes his very own catchy "jingles" to advertise their Fair Trade "market" bi-monthly endeavors and shares them during the announcements at Mass. Folks love it and look forward to not only the jingle, but what Fair Trade/Equal Exchange is doing and how together they impact the world.

## What Immediate Actions Paved the Way for The Francis Project: Living Shoreline?

- The pastor, Father John Grace, and 3 other parishioners visited the Diocese of Meru in Kenya to witness and connect with the local families and farmers where the 40,000 trees donated by Immaculate Conception Parish are thriving and producing much fruit for the environment and the economic stability in the local communities.
- Following that trip, the parish community gathered for a "Wine and Wonder" evening of sharing on what was learned and experienced through that international venture.



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- Father John also visited the Navajo Nation in Arizona where the Living Water project takes place and the initiative for producing simple water filters for clean water in the local communities is happening. As a result, the parishioners of Immaculate Conception were invited and took the proverbial ball and ran with crocheting covers for the filters and sending them to the Navajo Nation.

Out of that effort, their prayer shawl ministry grew, a group who now crochets and knits prayer shawls for those challenged physically, mentally, and/or spiritually to bring prayer, comfort, and hope to them from the parish community.

## What was The Francis Project: Living Shoreline?

A living shoreline is a protected and stabilized shoreline that is made of natural materials such as plants, sand, or rock (<https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/living-shoreline.html>). They are a natural approach to protecting tidal shorelines from erosion.

Immaculate Conception Parish was a partner in helping the Chesapeake Bay Foundation create a 1,000-linear-foot living shoreline along Virginia's Hampton River. The full story can be seen here: ([https://youtu.be/A6BJVwZqUS4?si=b4TcrDsLAGk\\_Yn4H](https://youtu.be/A6BJVwZqUS4?si=b4TcrDsLAGk_Yn4H))



These articles and reports also capture the impact of the project and the dedication of the parishioners:

- In the Chesapeake Bay Magazine: [Living Shoreline for the Pope: Church Teams up with Bay Foundation in Honor of Pontiff's Legacy](#)

- On the local news station: [Hampton Catholic church partners with Chesapeake Bay Foundation to honor Pope Francis](#)
- In the diocesan news: [Immaculate Conception, Hampton, parishioners help care for creation](#)

## After the Completion of the Project

Two (of the many) results and follow-up activities to the project include:

- A parish liturgy during the Season of Creation (World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, September 1<sup>st</sup> through the Feast of St. Francis, October 4<sup>th</sup>).
- A time for reflection, celebration, and planning for the future.

### ➤ Parish Liturgy

On September 12<sup>th</sup>, during the Season of Creation, the parish celebrated the Mass of Creation outside on the parish grounds.



Earlier in the summer, Pope Leo XIV introduced a special Mass for the Care of Creation (Missa pro custodia creationis) to mark two meaningful anniversaries:

- the 10th anniversary of *Laudato Si'*, written by the late Pope Francis
- the 800th anniversary of The Canticle of the Creatures by Saint Francis.

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As they observed the Season of Creation, the parish also concluded and celebrated the parish's participation in the Francis Project: Living Shoreline.

The parish website (<https://www.icchampton.org/careforcreation>) quotes Psalm 104, saying, "The psalmist is praising God who can be clearly recognized in the incredible beauty, complexity and grandeur of creation. God is the artist and creation is God's expression."

In God, we all are expressions of beauty and magnificence. To pause and see this wonderful relationship and then to give thanks to God was our prayer on Friday evening, September 12. Thank you for celebrating the greatness of God.

Let us continue to care and protect God's loving gift of life on our common home, Earth."



## ➤ Reflection Upon the Project

The parish is planning another "Wine and Wonder" evening to unpack this living shoreline project and delve into some reflection questions, such as:



### *Personal Experience and Motivation*

- What drew you to get involved in this service?

- When you think of your time serving, what moments stand out most vividly to you?

### *Encounter with Others*

- How have the people you've met through this project shaped your faith or perspective?
- In what ways have you experienced Christ in those you serve?

### *Spiritual Growth*

- How has your participation in outreach deepened your relationship with God?
- What has this endeavor taught you about living out the Gospel?

### *Community & Parish Life*

- How did this project connect you more deeply to the parish community? To your local community?
- In what ways do you see this project as part of the mission of the Church?
- How might our parish grow stronger in witness through service?

### *Looking Forward*

- What new opportunities for service would you like to explore?
- How do you hope your participation inspires or invites others?

This gathering will provide time for the parish to dream and reflect further together on what next steps can be taken in their moral obligation to care for creation, God's amazing gift to all of us.

### *Some GEMS Wonderings and Suggestions*

- What is happening in your community to which your parish could respond?

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- When was the last time your parish studied *Laudato Si'*?
- What practices does your parish do to care for creation?
- How will your parish celebrate next year's Season of Creation?
- How do you provide time for your parishioners to reflect on their involvement in service?
- Read how another parish has reached out to a need in Africa: [https://www.janetschaeffler.com/GEMS\\_89.pdf](https://www.janetschaeffler.com/GEMS_89.pdf)
- Now that you've finished reading this, why not forward it immediately to:
  - your pastoral staff
  - your parish pastoral council
  - your Christian Service Commission
  - your Justice and Peace Committee
  - someone in your parish who has expressed an interest in caring for our common home



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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)