



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

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A Best Practice: One Approach to Scripture Study

Perhaps one of the most popular forms of adult faith formation in our parishes today is Scripture study. Because the needs of each parish are different, there are multiple ways to offer this important and needed process.

This issue of **GEMS** looks at an approach used at St. Anthony on the Lake Parish, Pewaukee, WI. Al McCauley, Director of Adult Faith Formation, shares with his observations, beliefs, and suggestions.

In reading this, how might you tweak, change, or add to your parish Scripture study?

When and How?

The Bible study groups meet on Tuesdays at the parish for one hour in the morning (11a.m.-12 noon) and then are repeated the offering in the evening (6-7p.m.) for working folks. The timing is intentional: Not too early, nor too late. One-hour sessions leave them wanting more.

Holding two sessions also allows for flexibility for folks. For instance, if they have a daytime appointment, they know they can attend the evening meeting. This also serves to expose folks to other parishioners they might not have otherwise met.

Each session follows a “script” of sorts:

- Prayer
- Introduction / re-cap of previous week
- Orally proclaiming the Word (volunteers)
- Small group discussion at tables of 4-8 for about 20 minutes. (Even the shy folks will chat in small groups, whereas they may not in the large group setting – ensuring that everyone is still heard.)
- Large group sharing and interaction on the material
- A few pieces of art are usually used to enhance the Bible readings, and to look at differing interpretations.

Without realizing it, perhaps, folks come into the sessions and create their own small communities among the tables they choose to sit at. They begin to share – talk about their days, get to each other better, and continue to meet beyond the sessions.

Among the greatest gifts to witness is how these small groups attend to each other outside of our sessions – when one is hurting, has surgery, experiences the death of a loved one, etc. They continue meeting after and beyond the schedule – in effect living as Church outside of church!

How did this endeavor come about? What was the need?

Bible study had been typically “plug-and-play” - a DVD from a series from various publishers. While these are solid tools, folks had questions that couldn’t be answered without a leader present.

Plus, there was minimal small-group formation, so conversations often drifted away from the topic. Much of Al’s training in small and large group interactions came from his years of teaching high school theology courses.

How is it publicized?

Social media outlets, parish bulletin, word of mouth, website. Many times, participants will bring family members or friends from other parishes.

What factors motivate the people to respond and participate in this initiative?

Al is told repeatedly by older Catholic folks that they never had Bible study when they were younger. There is a real hunger to better understand the faith, and to know that it is rooted in Sacred Scripture.

Also, to attend a one-hour session is like dipping one’s toe in the pool. It allows for testing the waters before jumping into deeper study. Once most have seen that they “can do it,” there is an eagerness to continue.

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At the start of each session, Al posts the same list of four questions, reminding the participants that all serious Bible study or spiritual reading should endeavor to reply to these:

- What did you hear?
- How did you feel?
- What did you learn?
- What will you do now?

The participants have “permission” to go as deep and at whatever pace they’d like in what and how they study, so long as they’re moving toward number four. They find comfort and liberation in this: they don’t need to know and understand everything, but they can be a work in progress, as all spiritual development is a lifelong process.

What are the factors that make this initiative successful?

Al believes this only works for two reasons:

- The people show up and follow their desire to learn more about their faith.
- The parish has made a commitment to lifelong faith formation. Regardless of who leads the endeavor, folks will continue to meet and engage each other because it’s a priority for our parish.

Aware of the research on different learning styles and multiple intelligences, what types of processes, activities, methods did you use to engage people’s participation?

Within the hour-long session, the group uses silent reading, verbal reading, visual and audio examples, small and large group sharing...and they always serve coffee and snacks! Beyond cliché, there’s something about food that brings people together. Folks take turns and sign up to bring snacks for each other. Recipes get shared. Often, Al has to interrupt their casual conversations to start the session. That’s a blessing!

How have the participants responded?

The parishioners are open about feeling closer to their God because of the offerings provided by the parish. They appreciate a safe place where they can discuss their faith openly.



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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>
- *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