



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

#73 - January 2017

A Best Practice: Hospice Nurses and Heaven

When we reflect on our own lives as well as listen to the life stories of others, it doesn't take us long to realize that the various happenings within our lives are the jump-starts to our readiness to learn and grow in faith.

The best practice highlighted in this issue is a prime example of this reality: growth in faith and spirituality occurs and deepens because of reflection on the reality of our everyday life and death experiences.

The book and website - *Seasons of Adult Faith Formation* – provides more ideas on this truth: our growth faith is deeply connected with our everyday life experiences; paying attention to the life tasks and needs of the various seasons of life provide rich opportunities for faith growth.

- *The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation*
http://www.lifelongfaith.com/store/p25/The_Seasons_of_Adult_Faith_Formation.html
- *The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation website*
<http://www.lifelongfaith.com/2015-adult-faith-formation-symposium.html>

Who?

This opportunity, *Hospice Nurses and Heaven*, is currently offered for two different groups (with appropriate adaptations for each). The department of evangelization of the diocese of Green Bay, WI designed and presents *Hospice Nurses and Heaven* for:

- Senior citizens (especially in retirement communities and nursing homes)
- Interested parishioners (many who come are grieving the loss of a family member and/or friend)

How did it begin?

Listening to people's questions and wonderings, there is a universal curiosity and interest in what happens during the dying process and after death.

Joe Tremblay, adult faith formation coordinator for the diocese of Green Bay, WI, became acquainted with several hospice nurses. One of them had written a book about her experiences with dying patients who routinely reached out to God and their deceased relatives during their dying process. Joe found that other hospice nurses recounted similar experiences.

Joe realized that a reflection and conversation on this reality of dying (for many people) would be advantageous:

- to console those in grief, sharing with them the hopeful reality of seeing their loved ones again
- to help alleviate the fear that some people have of dying
- to deepen people's awareness of heaven
- to offer an opportunity to reflect on the Paschal Mystery – that death empowers us to live fully
- to help people realize that human experience confirms the teaching of Scripture and tradition

God said to St. Catherine of Siena
regarding family members in heaven:

“Although they are all joined in the bond of charity,
they know a special kind of sharing with those
whom they loved most closely
with a special love in the world,
a love through which they grew in grace and virtue. ...

So now in everlasting life they have not lost that love;
no, they still love and share with each other
even more closely and fully,
adding their love to the good of all.”

- *The Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena*

GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

Who facilitates this event?

For the first two years that the program was offered, it was led/facilitated by Joe Tremblay and/or Tina Poppe, a retired hospice nurse from the area. Presently other hospice nurses are being recruited and trained so that they also might serve as facilitators for the program.

What topics/themes are explored?

Through input, videos and conversations, the program explores the realities of:

- near-death experiences
- the dying experiences of many people, their reaching out to and experiencing God and their deceased relatives
- the foundational belief that life can be lived in one of two ways:
 - seeing death as the end of life
 - seeing death as the beginning of life (why the Catholic Church celebrates the feast of the saints on the day they died)
- the comfort and love of God at the time of death
- how Christ changed our views of death, freeing us from the fear of it
- the meaning of the Resurrection – Jesus’ story touches our lives

There is no such thing as time,” the patient said.
“Dying is like walking from the living room
into the dining room.
There are no beginnings and no endings.”

Then he closed his eyes for the last time.

- *Glimpses of Heaven* by Trudy Harris, RN

What have the participants said?

- “I must tell you, this was one of the very best presentations I have had the opportunity to attend. It offered me a faith-filled, inspiring, deeply moving experience.”
- “This opportunity was interesting and brought back some memories as well as a deepened understanding of death in my own personal life. Thank you.”
- “This is a topic that needs to be discussed and this session was done beautifully and humbly.”

Some Resources

- *Glimpses of Heaven: True Stories of Hope and Peace at the End of Life’s Journey* by Trudy Harris, RN (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IuyCFc3ZICU>).
- *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon’s Journey into the Afterlife* by Eben Alexander III M.D.
- *Imaging Life After Death: Love that Moves the Sun and Stars* by Kathleen Fischer.
- *Be Not Afraid: Overcoming the Fear of Death* by Johann Christoph Arnold.
- *Life after Life* by Raymond Moody.
- *Death – Our Journey Home: How Caring for a Dying Loved One Strengthened My Faith* by Patricia VonNeeda.
- *Hospice Whispers: Stories of Life* by Carla Cheatham.
- *No Time for Tears: Coping with Grief in a Busy World* by Judy Heath.
- *Parting: A Handbook for Spiritual Care Near the End of Life* by Jennifer Sutton Holder and Jann Aldredge-Clanton.

GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

- *The Gifts of Near-Death Experiences: You Don't Have to Die to Experience Your True Home* by Sheila Fabricant Linn, Dennis Linn, and Matthew Linn
- *The Grace in Dying: How We Are Transformed Spiritually As We Die* by Kathleen Dowling Singh.
- *Final Gifts: Understanding the Special Awareness, Needs, and Communications of the Dying* by Maggie Callanan and Patricia Kelley.

My experience showed me that the death of the body and brain are not the end of consciousness, that human experience continues beyond the grave.

More important, it continues under the gaze of a God who loves and cares about each one of us and about where the universe itself and all the beings within it are ultimately going.

- *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife*
by Eben Alexander III MD

GEMS Suggestions

- You might want to share this newsletter with your parish nurse, your parish health ministry team.
- Keep your eyes open for vignettes in today's movies and TV shows which illustrate death/resurrection; the communion of saints, etc.; for instance: snippets of the movie, *Places in the Heart*.
- To help you in planning an opportunity like this you might want to contact a local hospice organization.

- Have a book club discussion on one of the books listed above, such as *The Gifts of Near-Death Experiences: You Don't Have to Die to Experience Your True Home* by Sheila Fabricant Linn, Dennis Linn, and Matthew Linn
- If a parish/diocese offers a program such as this, might personal invitations be sent to:
 - families who are caring for a family member/friend who is terminally ill
 - families who recently experienced the death of a loved one
 - ministers who are taking communion to the homebound, Stephens Ministry, Befrienders
- For a related topic, see [GEMS #13: Don't Be Caught Dead, Plan Ahead](#)



Adding New Luster to an Old GEM

[GEMS #54](#) explored some unique ways of enjoying and sharing books. You might enjoy these articles and further ideas:

- More ideas on little free libraries:
<http://www.shareable.net/blog/indianapolis-goes-big-with-little-free-libraries>
- How to start your own free library:
<http://www.shareable.net/blog/how-to-start-your-own-little-free-library-in-6-easy-steps>
- An interesting perspective on e-books:
<http://michaelhyatt.com/ebooks-2016.html>
- Print books are on the rise: <http://michaelhyatt.com/ebooks-2016.html>



Golden Nuggets from You

Posted on LinkedIn: “I just read the [GEMS #45](#) issue - WOW! Great ideas on prayer. I am excited about the information. Blessings to you and all who are working to make a difference in adult faith formation.”

- Nancy Cunningham,
Pastoral Associate for Catechesis,
Sts. Simon & Jude Catholic Church,
Huntington Beach, California

“This is a very helpful newsletter. I hope people tell you this all the time!”

- Erin A. McGeever, M.A., M.Ed
Director of Christian Formation and Director of Ministry Formation
Diocese of St. Augustine, Jacksonville, FL

“As always you are such an inspiration. The numerous ideas that you pass on are so great, and even if not always implemented, they make me excited about trying the “new” and seeing where it goes.”

- Sr. Becky Vonderhaar, IHM,
Director of Religious Education,
Christ the Good Shepherd Parish, Lincoln Park, MI

“Fantastic issue ([GEMS #52](#)) on the labyrinth! I’ll send this to some of our pastors.”

- Cris Villapando, Director of Faith Formation,
Diocese of Charlotte, NC



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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>
- *The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation*
http://www.lifelongfaith.com/store/p25/The_Seasons_of_Adult_Faith_Formation.html
- *The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation website*
<http://www.lifelongfaith.com/2015-adult-faith-formation-symposium.html>