



# GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

*from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study*

#76 - April 2017

## A Best Practice: Ministry with Maturing Adults (Part II)

Last month we began a look at one approach to ministry with maturing adults, focusing on its beginnings and its foundations. In this issue we'll explore some specific programs and opportunities of Ministry with Mature Adults, most of which have been offered at St. Mary's Parish, Barrie, Ontario, Canada.

Our culture addresses questions of health, finances, housing and recreation for the retired population – but not issues of purpose and meaning which become more urgent as we grow older. These are the issues of spirit and faith.

*- Sr. Mary Rose Marrin, CSJ*

## An overview of some General Programs and Opportunities for all Maturing Adults in the Parish

- **Special Events:** Two or three social events each year for the purpose of community building, for example:
  - Celebrations of special days/seasons
  - Celebration of Cultures
  - Celebration of Talents
  - Winter Luncheon: Breaking up the January Winter-Blahs
- **Retreat/Reflection Days:** two to three times a year; for instance: Advent Prayer Time followed by a social
- **Focus on Health or Topics of Religious and/or Social Concern:** invited guest speakers two to three times a year. For instance:
  - Understanding Hearing Loss
  - Make Good Choices: Feeding your Soul, your Mind and Body through Nourishing Foods

Teach us how to count our days  
and so gain  
wisdom of the heart.

*- Psalm 90: 12*

## An overview of some Programs and Opportunities for Small Groups of Maturing Adults

- **Spiritual Growth in the Second Half of Life:** Various individual topics can be offered in four consecutive sessions. Some topics to explore might be:
  - A New Vision for the Retirement Years
  - Dealing with Loss: The Central Task of the Retirement Years
  - Understanding Feelings
  - The Primacy of Connection
  - Spiritual Strengths and Inner Resources
  - Reaching Out
  - The Challenge of Forgiveness
  - Gratitude and Celebration
  - The Creative Age
  - The Mystery of Paradox
  - We Walk by Faith
  - The Hidden Treasures in Our Own Story
  - Growth in Wisdom
  - Personal Prayer
  - A Lifelong Mission
- **Positive Aging:** an exploration of ways of journeying through the maturing years in hope and celebration

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- **Life Story Writing Group:** A ten session programme in which participants are guided in reflecting on each decade of life, using an adapted version of Dr. Richard Johnson's book, *All My Days*. From their reflection, participants look back over their lives in order to gain deeper understanding, clearer perspective and a more integrated view.

A person does not need to be a skilled writer to be part of this programme. Very basic skills are sufficient. The group sessions give direction and support to the projects. The primary purpose of the programme is the search for meaning and the search for increased awareness of God's constant presence within one's life story.

The Life Story Writing Program provides an opportunity to stop, take stock, look back over the process of life in order to gain deeper understanding, clearer perspective and a more integrated view.

Undertaken from a faith perspective, it is a search for evidence in your life that God has been with and is still with you. Such discovery nourishes one's inner being, renews one's spirit and energizes for the journey ahead.

- Dr. Richard Johnson

- **Writing Circle Alumni Group:** This is a gathering for those who have completed the Life Story Program and wish to continue writing.



- **Scripture Programmes:** four to six sessions using CD or DVD presentations, followed by conversation; e.g. presentations by Fr. Don Senior. One possible resource is *Now You Know Media* (<https://www.nowyouknowmedia.com/>).

- **Lunch and Learn:** A noon-hour programme of DVD lectures (1/2 hour) followed by conversation.

At St. Mary's, this is offered every Monday throughout the year after the 12:10 pm Mass. One of the lectures offered last year was a DVD series on St. Hildegard of Bingen-Woman of Light.



- **Journeys through the Maturing Years:** A Film Programme which invites reflection on six feature films in which maturing adults encounter change and how they respond to this change. Some possibilities of films: *The Straight Story*, *The Trip to Bountiful*, *On Golden Pond*, *Amour*, etc.
- **Workshops:** A one day workshop on "Creating a Vision for Maturing Years" or "Retirement as a Spiritual Journey."
- **Faith Friends:** An outreach programme to support maturing adults who are no longer able to actively participate in parish life. It offers an opportunity to share mutually in the joy of faith through meaningful conversation and prayer.
- **Next Chapter:** A faith-based support network for women who have been widowed. The network presents an opportunity for those who have had a common experience and are interested in a gathering of mutual support through faith. Age is not important; it is life circumstances that create a common bond.

At St. Mary's, this is not a bereavement support group and is not intended to replace the Bereavement Support Group which is also provided.



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- **Book Study:** A gathering for five to six sessions to reflect on a specific book of fiction, biography/memoir and spirituality; e.g. the writings of Henry Nouwen.

- **Ministry Reflection Group:** A monthly gathering of volunteers involved in service within the parish or in service within the broader community to reflect on their activities within the context of faith.

One example of this might be *Bridging the Gap – through outreach!* This day of reflection and training is a workshop for all those who currently participate in ministry to shut-ins. It can be planned for Ministers of the Eucharist, Faith-friends, Friendly Visitors as well as those who may be discerning if this ministry is for them.

Workshop topics could include: how to have meaningful visits, an overview of many health issues, chronic disease, and an overview of dementia.

- **Meditation Group:** A bi-monthly facilitated meeting which is deeply rooted in the Catholic Christian tradition.

- **Neighbourhood Circles:** This is a parish-based support group of maturing adults who live in the same neighbourhood or retirement residence. The group meets on a regular basis for a simple form of prayer followed by coffee and conversation.

In St. Mary's, Barrie, Ontario, the program is held monthly at two community settings.



- **Parish Prayer Companions:** These are elders in the parish community who are commissioned by the pastor to pray for a specific parish ministry on a daily basis. This commitment is for one year, always renewable.

## What Have Participants Said?

The necessity and the impact of this ministry to maturing adults is concretely seen in comments from some of the participants:

- “My involvement in this ministry has been life-changing.”
- “As a widower of 2-1/2 years, my life seemed to be ‘on hold.’ Through the various ministry activities, I have met new people and have become better acquainted with many people. ... My sense of belonging has never been greater.”
- “This ministry has brought parishioners close together and, I believe, closer to God.”
- “I have enjoyed all the sessions and I really think I have grown as a person.”
- “The ministry has helped me to see how the parish is a family and how much we need to help each other.”

Aging teaches me ... to live in wholeness.

- Dr. Richard P. Johnson

## How Has This Ministry Grown?

When Sr. Mary Rose Marrin left St. Mary's in 2012 another full time staff person was hired for the ministry who is now trained with a Certificate in Spiritual Gerontology. Recently a second parish has hired a Maturing Adults Minister who is currently engaged in obtaining her certificate.

Since 2012 Sr. Mary Rose has offered her services throughout the archdiocese of Toronto to raise awareness of the need for this ministry and to support initiatives in its development. The Office of Formation for Discipleship of the archdiocese has offered supportive encouragement and sponsored some programmes and is now actively engaged in promoting this ministry within the archdiocese.

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## GEMS Wonderings

- Looking at the list of topics on page 1 (Spiritual Growth in the Second Half of Life), which topic speaks most strongly to the needs of your parish?
  - Who might you invite to plan and implement it?
  - Based on your experience of your parish, what topics/themes are missing from this list?
- Are there programs/opportunities that you are presently offering that can be tweaked to respond to the needs of maturing adults?
- Many maturing adults are seeking, are hungry for, continued growth in their faith. At the same time, there might be many who think “I know all about my faith.” How might we help them to see that the faith journey never ends? How might we encourage them to realize that spirituality deepens and grows during our maturing years?
- How are you tapping into the wisdom – and spirituality - of maturing adults?

## GEMS Request

What are you doing in your parish for maturing adults? Send me your endeavors, your GEMS, so that we can share them with others in future issues. ([jschaeffler@adriandominicans.org](mailto:jschaeffler@adriandominicans.org))



### Golden Nuggets from You

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

- *Cris Villapando, Director of Faith Formation Programs,  
Diocese of Charlotte, North Carolina*

“I LOVED this issue of GEMS ([#54](#)). I am an avid reader and the ideas of sharing books with others really energized me. I will be adding a "share a book" day to my VBS this summer to donate to the neighborhood rescue mission. Thanks for all your hard work.”

- *Diane Seidel, St. Boniface Parish, Bay City, Michigan*

“Love it and going to use it tomorrow ([GEMS #62](#)). Thanks!”

- *Linda Smith, Adult Faith Formation and RCIA,  
Holy Cross Parish, Atlanta, GA*



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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>
- *The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation*  
[http://www.lifelongfaith.com/store/p25/The\\_Seasons\\_of\\_Adult\\_Faith\\_Formation.html](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>