



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

21 - September 2012

A Best Practice:

Imagine an Adult Faith Formation practice that:

- was planned to fit the life-styles and schedules of the participants
- originally was designed to reach the needs of one group of parishioners, but grew to include many others
- included individual home study as well as group reflection and conversation
- was designed as a ten month program, yet people asked for more – and so it continued!
- fostered and built community
- began as “one event” to meet one need, but grew into many different opportunities which kept on growing

Is this possible, you might ask? Keep on reading for this month’s adventure. Think about what possibilities it might hold for your situations.

What is It?

With the enthusiastic intent of providing the best of catechist formation, the catechetical staff of St. Therese of Lisieux Parish, Shelby Township, Michigan, and their vicariate (the grouping of parishes in their geographic region), provides formation toward catechist certification through **various delivery systems:**

- on-site courses (throughout the vicariates and the archdiocese) of a developed program of theological, ministerial and catechetical topics
- online courses (through [VLCFF at the University of Dayton](#), The Virtual Learning Community for Faith Formation)
- video assisted home and group study ([Echoes of Faith Plus](#) from NCCL/RCL Benziger)

These are the delivery systems/processes that are the channels for catechist formation in the Archdiocese of Detroit.

There are numerous advantages to each process; this issue explores the inspiration for and the (growing) effects of the third one: *Echoes of Faith Plus*.

Like all Christians, catechists are called to continual conversion and growth in their faith and, for this reason, are called to ongoing spiritual formation. ...

In addition to spiritual formation, the catechist is also in need of pedagogical information, especially as society, teaching methods, and culture change.

-National Directory for Catechesis, #55.C

When the archdiocese revised and updated the catechist formation process to include these three processes, the catechetical and pastoral staff of St. Therese of Lisieux Parish was excited about the new possibilities (as well as many other parishes throughout the archdiocese).

These three delivery systems expanded the opportunities to respond to the continual challenge of providing catechists with sound, theological, and practical formation that also accommodates the busy schedules of life today.

Carefully considering the needs of their catechists, St. Therese Parish chose to implement the *Echoes of Faith Plus* option (not knowing at the

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time how it would continue to grow and include all the adults of the parish, as well as the catechists).

Echoes of Faith Plus is a basic level video-assisted resource for catechist formation which was developed as a project of [NCCL \(National Conference for Catechetical Leadership\)](#) and [RCL Benziger](#).

The *Echoes* process is made up of a series of modules, divided into three categories:

- The Catechist
- Theology
- Methodology

The main components of each module are a DVD and a Companion Booklet. The DVD includes a four-segment video process related to the module content plus two expert interviews.

The Companion Booklet anchors the *Echoes* process.

- It includes a four-segment process of reflection during which participants move back and forth between the DVD and the booklet material.
- A feature of the booklet is a CD-ROM. It provides the four basic video segments in a compressed format that can be viewed on a computer screen.

Within the archdiocese of Detroit process, two options are suggested for the use of *Echoes of Faith Plus*:

- The process for using *Echoes* takes place in a group setting that models Christian community and faith sharing. Each module is facilitated by a certified Master Catechist and follows the format outlined in the DVD and Companion Booklet.

In addition to the material covered by these resources, the facilitator also incorporates the content of the two interviews found on the DVD into the catechetical sessions.

- The process involves the individual viewing of the DVD and completion of the Companion Booklet. The facilitator then convenes a gathering of catechists after each module is completed to guide a sharing of insights and integration of learning.

The facilitator also incorporates the content of the two interviews found on the DVD into the catechetical session.

(Note: in several parishes which are using the second option, catechists/Catholic school teachers have chosen – on their own - to get together to view the DVD portions and talk about insights as they are going through the “individual part” of this process.)

The formation of catechists
takes place most effectively
within the community of faith under the
direction of the local pastor.

The parish is where ‘catechists test their
own vocation and continually nourish their
own apostolic awareness.’

Parish-centered programs for catechists
remind them that their calling as catechists
come from the Church,
that they are sent by the Church,
and that they hand on the faith of the Church.

-National Directory for Catechesis, #55.F

The Original Process

St. Therese of Lisieux Parish chose the second option. In August 2008 all catechists, catechetical aides, etc. were invited to a general

session during which the program/process of *Echoes of Faith Plus* was introduced and explained. Fifty-seven people attended; forty-two chose to begin the process at that time.

For the 2008/2009 year, the catechists individually used their Companion Booklets, with CD-ROMs, at home and gathered together once a month to **process together their learning and delve deeper** through the bonus interviews on the DVD.

The parish offered two times each month so that catechists could attend according to their schedules and convenience:

- Thursday evening at 6:30 pm
- Saturday morning at 8:30 am

Although most catechists stayed with a specific time, they were also able to “float” between these two sessions, if/when their schedules necessitated it. This flexibility *mined new GEMS* within each group.

There were some instances in which catechists did not have access to a computer at home. They were invited to the parish to use one of the parish computers or watch the DVD on a TV. (As happens in other parishes, several catechists from St. Therese scheduled time to do this together.)

As this first year ended, thirty-seven catechists completed the process. During the summer, for any of the catechists who had missed a module, a make-up day was scheduled.

- Four attended, completing their certification, bringing the number for the year to forty-one.
- The one other person who began this year completed in 2010 when the module he needed was repeated for a new group of participants. Thus, all who began the process – finished!

Tell me and I forget.
Teach me and I remember.
Involve me and I learn.

- Benjamin Franklin

Then It Grew

In June, after having completed the process, all the participants asked: “What’s next?”

In addition to appreciating the learning and faith growth that had occurred for them, the catechists enjoyed getting together. They had become a bonded group.

The pastoral staff and catechetical staff heard their request and responded. **“Echoes II” was born** for St. Therese Parish. Using the same format as *Echoes of Faith Plus*, the book and DVD series, the catechists explored *The Mystery of Faith: An Introduction to Catholicism* by Fr. Michael Himes, (St. Anthony Messenger Press, www.americancatholic.org). ([A Leader's Guide](#) is also available.)

With this offering, all adults from the parish were invited, not only the catechists. Two sessions were offered:

- Wednesday evening at 6:30 pm
- Saturday morning immediately following *Echoes of Faith Plus* for a new group of catechists.

Yes, a new group of catechists using *Echoes of Faith Plus* formed! Following the same procedures as the first year, e.g. an introductory meeting of invitation and explanation, a larger group of catechists came forward. They had heard from the now-certified catechists that the time investment was more than worth it – and of the enjoyment that came for learning and deepening community.

As the year ended, these catechists were certified and another group (the Echoes II group) added enrichment credit to their “portfolios.”

Then They Asked For ...
more.

Thus, in 2010/1011, the process was repeated again. *Echoes of Faith Plus* was offered because even more catechists responded to this third year.

The opportunity for “Echoes II” continued; this time using the book, *The Holy Longing* by Fr. Ron Rolheiser. With parishioners and the newly-certified catechists, the group grew!

And Then ...
it again continued to grow.

The number of catechists from St. Therese of Lisieux Parish needing certification was now diminishing, since many had completed certification in the previous three years.

At the same time, the effectiveness of *Echoes of Faith Plus* was becoming more widespread. Thus, many of the neighboring parishes were using this process and/or were sending their catechists to St. Therese of Lisieux Parish.

For the year 2011/2012, then, many of the participants came from other parishes, either to participate in the full year or to “catch” a module which they had missed at their parish.

“Echoes II” continued and grew. The participants, especially the catechists, asked for more in-depth formation on Scripture. The module, “Introduction to Scripture,” from [Little Rock Scripture Study](#)

was offered twice a week, using the same process and schedule as previous “Echoes II” years.

A request that a week-day time slot for “Introduction to Scripture” be made available was answered:

- A third group now met immediately following morning Mass for six weeks.
- An ecumenical Woman’s Bible Study which was taking place in the community joined this gathering, which added an exciting dimension.

The number of participants from the parish (other than catechists) increased significantly for this offering.

And still again ...
more growth and participation was occurring.

Because of the experience of what was happening – especially ecumenically - the six-week group asked for more enrichment. They had discovered WIIFM – What’s In It For Me.

This group continued to meet throughout Lent-Easter, using *Journey into Light: Lent 2012* (reflections on the Sunday Gospels for Lent and Easter) by Joan Chittister.

Without realizing it, a **POCKET OF GOLD** had been found and mined.

- Initially, the parish staff responded to the need for beginning and ongoing catechist formation.
- Because it was meeting real needs for formation and community, others wanted to be a part of this; catechist formation became exciting parish adult faith formation.

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- Sensitive to various scheduling needs, multiple opportunities were offered.
- The participants purposely invited others (e.g. the ecumenical group) to join them.
- The parish became the place for the church to gather.

Responses from the Participants over the years...

- "I had been away from the Church for awhile. I needed to find out on my own, not what others were telling me, what were the truths, or beliefs, what had changed." *Cyndi I. (catechist)*
- "I love the flexibility! I can do it from home when it's convenient; I can bounce my questions and ideas off on others at our once a month meetings. It's perfect" *Kim L. (lector)*
- "I feel so much better prepared as a catechist. I feel more confident, and I feel better about my own faith life as well." *Andrea V. (catechist)*
- "I would have never dreamed that it would be possible for Catholics and non-Catholics to study together in a church. I turned Catholic 50 years ago, and back then we just didn't do this. It is wonderful to be able to share our experiences with one another...breaking down those invisible walls." *Barb S. (parishioner)*
- "I love bouncing off the different ideas discussed with my husband when I get home. These sessions have helped us discuss more freely what we believe." *Cyndi I. (catechist)*
- "I have a better appreciation of the Mass because of this module." *Barb W. (RCIA team member)*

- "I am surprised at how many similarities we share; I didn't know that's what Catholics believed about saints and Mary." *Tracy D. (ecumenical group)*

Education is not the filling of a pail
but the lighting of a fire.

-William Butler Yeats

Some GEMS to Ponder

- Throughout this process, more and more people experienced that catechist formation is – at its heart – adult faith formation. It's not simply “how I do things” with my learners.
- It's not something that needs to be done to get a certificate and then “I'll have that over with.” The catechist formation process invites each catechist to involvement – intellectually, spiritually, psychologically – so that who they are as a person, as a disciple, is transformed.
- The ecumenical factor in the most recent “Echoes II series, “Introduction to Scripture,” was a component which brought a new dimension. Some people could recall growing up at a time of “great divide” among Christians of other denominations. They welcomed this opportunity to discuss their faith with others.
- Why did *Echoes of Faith Plus* work? Why did the experience cause the catechists to ask for more? There are probably many reasons. One primary one is that the process for *EOFP* is truly adult-centered. Everything about it follows the [Principles of Adult Faith Formation](#).

A Sparkling Suggestion

This issue has recounted how one parish met the needs of their catechists through one resource: *Echoes of Faith Plus* (and then it grew into continuing adult faith formation, using various resources).

Other parishes have used *EOFP* in various ways, for catechists as well as for parish adult faith formation. One possibility: use the Theological Models:

- I Believe, We Believe
- The Scriptures
- Liturgy and Sacraments
- Prayer and Spirituality
- Catholic Morality

for a year-long adult faith formation program for your parishioners.

Home groups or at-the-parish setting could take place. The opportunities could be offered

- for specific groups (young moms, couples, young adults, etc.)
- at various times to meet the diverse schedules



Response From the Staff

No one was more surprised than the pastoral staff at the success of this entire process. They found a golden **GEM** and, in the continual mining, opportunities for all adults became brighter and brighter.

"All we wanted to do initially was meet the catechists' need for formation. We were pleased that the initial participants wanted to continue, but to see the continued growth, both in numbers and formation, of the participants over the years was exciting as well as humbling.

I think the success was

- our hearing, as well as listening, to the needs, and
- letting the participants take the lead.

As a staff we really just facilitated the energy." *Elaine Young (Pastoral Associate)*



Golden Nuggets from You

“What a true **GEM** of a bulletin on [hospitality](#). Thank you for continuing our ongoing efforts to enhance hospitality within all phases of parish and community life.

Since hospitality is a clear theme in all of Scripture, but especially in Jesus' ministry, it should be a clear priority in parishes. That means that each staff member and leaders and members of all committees can be charged with the responsibility of modeling hospitality in every aspect of parish life. Since Liturgy is the primary meeting place for a majority of parishioners, hospitality should be key in all facets of weekend liturgies.

At the weekly ‘coffee and rolls,’ greeting new members or any unfamiliar face should be a regular pattern. Parish leaders should know if their members feel welcomed. If a simple written survey indicates that a majority do not feel welcomed, the agenda for further leadership meetings would include strategies for becoming a welcoming parish community.”

- Jackie Staley, *Resurrection Parish, Allouez, WI;*
former Director of Evangelization, diocese of Green Bay

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"The GEMS series on the [role of hospitality](#) in adult faith formation formed a talking point and small group discussion topic in a recent series presented in our diocese on the charisms of Benedictine spirituality. The ways we welcome people, the actions we take that allow others to feel 'at home' are addressed in the Rule as integral to community life. The GEMS series really brings this understanding into our current parish settings."

- *Stephanie DeCoste McNeill*

Director, Adult Faith Formation, Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee

"Thank you for taking the time to put together the wonderful resources on your website. I'm working with my small Episcopal Church in Delaware to help it not only survive but thrive. I was hunting down some best practices on [welcoming new parishioners](#) and I came across your website. I like the information because it gives us enough specifics that we can put a plan together, but it also gives examples and enough thoughts and questions to customize the plan for our church."

- *Tracy Morgan, Managing Partner, North Star Strategies*

(We welcome your comments, thoughts, suggestions, ideas, etc. Your views and practices continually support and encourage others. Email them to jschaeffler@adriandominicans.org any time.)



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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 at:

- <http://ecatechist.com>. Click on ebooks for: *40 Tips: Getting Started in Adult Faith Formation*.
- www.pastoralplanning.com. Go to Adult Formation: *Nuts & Bolts: Planning and Best Practices for Adult Formation*.