



# GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

*from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study*

# 28 - April 2013

## THE CONTENT OF ADULT FAITH FORMATION

...as revealed in our Best Practices Study (Part VI)

The last two months, in [GEMS #26](#) and [GEMS #27](#), we looked at three themes regarding the content of adult faith formation:

- The possible expanse of content for adult formation
- Content related to people's lives and experiences
- The prophetic role of adult faith formation leaders/parishes in providing for adult faith formation

**One more reflection:** As we close this exploration on content and the needs of today's adults, in this additional reflection (a lengthy quote), Seth Godin (February 8, 2010) reflects on [the needs of people from a business/client standpoint](#). (What does it say for adult formation?)

*"In the face of significant change and opportunity, people are often one of the three. If you're going to be of assistance, it helps to know which one. Uninformed people need information and insight in order to figure out what to do next. They are approaching the problem with optimism and calm, but they need to be taught. Uninformed is not a pejorative term, it's a temporary state.*

*Clueless people don't know what to do and they don't know that they don't know what to do. They don't know the right questions to ask. Giving them instructions is insufficient. First, they need to be sold on what the platform even looks like.*

*And frightened people will resist any help you can give them, and they will blame you for the stress the change is causing. Scared people like to shoot the messenger. Duck....*

***Before someone can change, they have to learn, and before they learn, they have to cease being scared.***

*One reason so many big ideas come from small organizations is that there is far less fear of change at the top. One mistake board members and*

*shareholders make is that they reward the scared but hyper-confident CEO, instead of calling him on the carpet as he rages at change.*

*When I first encountered surfing, I was scared of it. It looks cool, but an old guy like me can get hurt. A patient instructor allayed my fears until I was willing to get started. When you first start out, the things you think are important are actually irrelevant, and it's the stuff you don't know is important that gets you thrown into the ocean. Finally, and only then, was I smart enough to actually learn.*

*I'm bad at surfing now, but at least I know why.*

***Comfort the frightened, coach the clueless and teach the uninformed."***

### Wondering GEMS:

- How do you need comforting, coaching and teaching?
- Have new big ideas come from your small groups, committees?
- Who, in your community, needs comforting, coaching or teaching?

**A second closing reflection:** The aim, of course, of adult faith formation is to walk with adults on the journey toward "mature adult faith" as we "respond generously to God's call" (*Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*, #49). Formation toward mature adult faith implies moving from dependent to interdependent styles of ministry and learning.

As we conclude our look at "content" in adult faith formation, where do we stand along the following continuum in relationship to **our approach to content?**

- Where does the parish and its current adult faith formation ministry fall?
- Where does the adult faith formation coordinator, parish staff, parish adult faith formation committee fall?

***It might be interesting to mark the continuum with two different colors – one for the parish's ministry, and one for the parish's leadership.***

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Dependent Ministry & Learning-----Interdependent Ministry & Learning  
 6                      5                      4                      3                      2                      1                      0

<b>HOW WE SEE/APPROACH THE “CONTENT” of ADULT FAITH FORMATION</b>	
<b>“Sacred vs. Profane”</b>	<b>“Religion as a quality of all experiences”</b>
Restricted in scope to theological, scriptural, liturgical issues	All topics are seen as having religious implications; all experiences are touched by the sacred; a wholistic approach
Content determined by the facilitator/parish according to the perceived needs of the learners	Content is determined by the life tasks, interests, and educational needs of the learner in dialogue with the facilitator and the faith community
Content is presented according to the logic of the subject matter	Content presentation involves sequencing according to learner readiness
Focus is on content units/blocks	Focus is on problem units
Content is generally not integrated by the learners into their lived behavior	Content is woven into lived experiences, enlightens conscience, is evident in lived behavior/conversion
Doctrines solve all questions pertinent to all studied issues	Creative interaction with experienced problems and doctrine is encouraged
Interprets Church development against the background of detailed directives which “faithful” Christians follow obediently; can be narrow and confining	Greater appreciation of the possibilities offered by unforeseen challenges; challenges offer the Spirit the opportunity to lead
Content, at times, presented with little freedom and little adaptability to new demands	Fidelity to doctrine allows room to think; “thinking through” is presented as necessary for the maturing Christian (facilitator and learner)

Adapted from *Rethinking Adult Religious Education: A Practical Parish Education*  
 by Jeanne Tighe and Karen Szentkeresti (Paulist Press, 1986)



## Golden Nuggets from You

“I am an Usher in the Primitive Baptist Denomination. While browsing for new information to present to my Ushers' Class, I came upon your [GEMS #4](#) on the Art of Hospitality. It has some very good information that relates directly with the Ushers Ministry.”

- *Deacon Carl D. Batts, Cleveland, Ohio*

“Just a note to thank you for this series, [GEMS #15](#) through [GEMS #18](#). They are Truly Gems!”

- *Jude VanBaalen, OP, St. Mary Parish, Prince George, British Columbia, Canada*



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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 at:

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