



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

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A Best Practice: A Do-It-Yourself Evening of Reflection

Would you like to offer an opportunity for the faith growth of the adults in your parish which:

- takes very little planning and work
- requires minimal materials and no media
- necessitates no set-up
- calls people to prayer
- provides the potential for deepened understanding and appreciation of Eucharist and the church as sacred space

Then this issue, featuring another best practice of adult faith formation, is exactly what you need.

In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy, this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else, for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit.

Therefore, through the needed program of instruction, pastors of souls must zealously strive to achieve it in all their pastoral work.

- Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, #14

The Genesis of the Idea

As St. Paul Parish, Phoenix, Arizona, planned for the changes in the celebration of the liturgy (Advent 2011) because of the *New Roman Missal*, they educated and formed sixty-two trainers (parishioners).

(Let's digress for a moment to explain this process at St. Paul Parish for the New Roman Missal: The Lifelong Faith Formation Committee realized that formation for the changes because of the New Roman Missal would need to be planned by and led by the parish. They knew that their people would have to be formed as leaders in this process.

Thus, the committee began with their lists of lectors, ushers, choir, Eucharistic Ministers and prayed over them. They culled it to sixty-six people, sending each a letter inviting them to a process that included them becoming "teachers"/facilitators in the implementation of the Roman Missal.

It was a six-week process. Materials from Liturgy Training Publications were used as the basis. The committee joined these trainers in doing some of the teaching. Sixty-two people committed to the six weeks.

They formed teaching groups of three or four and taught various sessions to the parishioners. There were teams for the evening, after Masses, during the day. Two hundred and fifty parishioners participated and learned of the changes in this manner through small groups.

The sixty-two trainers also took turns being present after the weekend liturgies for several weeks - just being present so parishioners could ask questions at coffee or right outside the church building. They wore buttons "Ask Me about the New Liturgy!" It was fun and it got people talking.)

During the formation for these sixty-two trainers, the Lifelong Faith Formation Committee presented various sessions for them, based on Vatican II's *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium)* and the *New Roman Missal*. As Mary Ann Ronan, Director of Faith Formation and Coordinator of Adult Education, worked with the Committee, she realized more and more that the trainers needed to be in touch with their church building and the meaning of Eucharist, not just from the head (understanding), but also from the heart (meaning for our lives).

What was planned?

The idea of a “retreat evening” to prayerfully reflect upon their church building of St. Paul, their sacred space, which calls them to celebrate Eucharist, was envisioned and planned for these sixty-two trainers.

The participants were invited to spend time – alone - at six “stations” throughout the church building. To assist them in their reflection and prayer, they were given a handout for each of the stations:

- The altar
- The cross
- Genuflecting/bowing
- Silence
- The Liturgy of the Word
- The Body and the Blood of Christ

The one-page handout for each “station” contained:

- Some background and reflection on that topic
- Some suggestions for personal prayer, reflection, action related to that topic, such as:
 - How is this altar your life? What do you need to lay on it?
 - You are invited to do some gesture of prayer that speaks of your relationship with Christ; with this altar.
 - Prostrate yourself on the floor in the form of the cross. Where does it take you?
 - Stand, sit, kneel at the Ambo with the Word. Go and sit in the pew, pick up the readings for Sunday. Read them slowly and reflect. What word is planted in you, what does it call forth from you? Name it.

Copies of the full handouts for the six stations can be found at www.janetschaeffler.com. Click on AFF Helps.

“The Word of the Lord.”

This phrase is powerful. Yes, the lector is referring to what she/he has just proclaimed – this “word” in the lectionary, but when she/he – a baptized, anointed Christian – looks at it – an assembly of the same - in the eyes and saying this, she/he is saying more.

She/he is saying her/his name.
She/he is the word of the Lord,
the living, breathing utterance of God here and now.
She/he is also saying our name.
We are the word of the Lord.

Hearing the word of the Lord is a call to let it in our gut,
let it kick at our insides; it burns and rips
and will not be held back.
We become the word for the world.

- From the handout for *The Liturgy of the Word*

What happened?

The evening was scheduled, thinking it would last approximately ninety minutes. The trainers spent two and a half hours at the six stations. They entered the sacred space and this experience intently, taking the space and its meaning into their lives. They fully entered into the suggested prayer, reflection and action - bowing, prostrating, looking, pondering, taking the space into their lives.

A quieting music CD was playing in the background, just enough to hear it, but not to distract. No one talked. In the chapel area, which was used for the Silence station, you could not hear a sound, even the breathing was slowed.

Did anything else happen?

Because the evening had been so meaningful for the trainers, it was offered for all parishioners during the time of learning, study and preparation for the *New Roman Missal*. It was offered several times, both during the evening and daytime hours.

With these opportunities, the sessions were begun with prayer to orientate the participants to the building, pointing out the six “stations” and inviting them to peruse the “stations” at their leisure.

The parishioners entered the experience. When people witnessed others actually doing some of the prayer forms suggested, they tried them. The more comfortable people got in realizing that others were not watching them, they participated.

What motivated people to participate?

Upon reflection, Mary Ann and the committee feel this might have been the root of people’s motivation: With all the changes facing parishioners, they came in a desire to:

- grow in their understanding of the Eucharist
- reflect on the church building itself, realizing that it was not moving or changing
- appreciate what is present in their sacred space and grow in their understanding of it

What were the responses ... from the sixty-two trainers?

- I could have stayed here all night in prayer.
- I get what going away to a quiet place means in the Scriptures.
- I never really looked at my Church building and what the pieces are and what they mean and how they help us pray.
- I now know Sacred Space begins with me and my relationship to it.

To come to this table is to come to Christ.

That is what we name this table: Christ.
On the day of the dedication, the bishop sprinkled this altar
with water, slathered it with a mixture of
olive oil and perfume called chrism,
robed it in fine linen and set candles around it.

Sound familiar?
We, too, on the day of our baptism were washed with water,
anointed with oil,
robed in fine garments and entrusted with light
– we became Christians, other Christ’s,
an altar of sacrifice, a banquet table for the hungry,
the homeless, etc.

This consecrated altar stands here,
Christ in our midst, center of our life,
our life lived for the sake of the world.

- From the handout for *The Altar*

What were the responses ... from the parishioners?

- I liked the Silence most but at first I was uncomfortable.
- I never understood the meaning of all the pieces.
- I never related all the space to the Liturgy – just thought it was there.
- I see myself now a part of my Church building.
- I appreciate my Church.
- I never would have bowed, let alone prostrate myself – I loved prostrating near the tabernacle! It helped me give all to Jesus!
- Our church building is sacred space and I love it.

As a staff, what do you think some of the effects of this offering have been?

- An increased appreciation of the church building itself, all the sacred space and how it leads to prayer
- More reverence toward the tabernacle
- There appears to be more participation in the liturgy
- People now call things by their name, not just: “You know, where Father says Mass”
- More pride in their parish by explaining things to visitors

Some Shining GEMS

It seems that there are so many advantages to this best practice. From the focus of adult faith formation, consider:

- Liturgical catechesis
- Often adult faith formation uses the format of a workshop or a class. Yet, we know it can take many formats. One shining proof!

If you were to do it again, would you do anything differently?

As Mary Ann reflected on this question, her responses were:

- I believe the opportunity needs to be offered to all Liturgical Ministers, choirs, etc. It could be part of Liturgical Formation, a retreat, or an evening of prayer.
- I would like to see it offered twice a year for the parish as new parishioners are joining all the time.

And another opportunity...

The Youth Minister of St. Paul Parish adopted the idea and used it as an evening of prayer with the youth. They responded and liked it, learning much about their church building and increasing their understanding and appreciation of the Eucharist.

In some of the prayer and ritual suggestions the youth seemed not to enter into them as fully as the adults, probably because of self-consciousness that might be present when they are within their peer group setting.

A Sparkling GEM Suggestion

This process, of course, can be personalized for your parish, your church building. “The stations” might be expanded to more than these six, might be different than these six.

Two Wondering GEMS

Is there a way this offering could be done as a virtual experience? Is it possible? When you think outside the box, what possibilities come to you? Send your thoughts to jschaeffler@adriandominicans.org so that the suggestions can be shared with all of us.

Could this reflection be used during the process of clustering and merging parishes? Would it be helpful as parishioners come together in a “new” worship space?”



Janet Schaeffler, OP
www.janetschaeffler.com
jschaeffler@adriandominicans.org

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 e-books 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*.