



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

31 - July 2013

A Best Practice: A Parish Week of Renewal

Have you ever been one of the coordinators of a major parish event, a formation event, and remarked when it was over (amid your exhaustion): “This was the most amazing parish event I’ve ever experienced”? That was the exhilarated and grateful response from Kathy Montag, Assistant to the Director of Religious Education at Transfiguration Catholic Church, Marietta, GA <http://www.transfiguration.com/>

In this issue, we’ll follow the journey of this happening, this renewal process, designed for all members of the parish: young and older, children, youth and adults, singles and families, etc.

Where/how did the idea originate?

A planning committee was put into place to begin the process. The planning committee consisted of the Parish Life Committee accompanied by several staff members, in addition to the parish Adult Education Coordinator who serves permanently on the committee: the Assistant to the Director of Religious Education, the Director of Media, the Directory of Liturgy and one of the deacons.

(To stop for a moment to understand the processes at Transfiguration: The Parish Life Committee, a very busy and committed ministry, functions under the Liturgical Advisory Committee. They create and provide para-liturgical opportunities for the parish to deepen parishioners’ faith growth and relationship with God. Often these offerings are related to the liturgical seasons, e.g. several opportunities for Stations of the Cross. As a follow-up to the endeavor described here, they are in the process of forming small faith communities.)

This planning committee (about twelve people), along with guidance from the pastor, began conversations, deciding that they didn’t want to have an annual parish mission. Rather, they desired to have a large-scale event, held every three years, for parish renewal, but chose to not call it a “mission.” Through discussion and shared insights, they found they wanted

to avoid some of the connotations that the word “mission” implied for many people. They believed that the word was “tired.” (See [GEMS #12.](#))

The committee brainstormed, the staff brainstormed, resulting in the term “Awakening” that would supplant the word “mission.” The first Awakening would be themed “Mission Possible.”

After a great deal of prayer, thought and brainstorming, the Awakening evolved into a four night presentation by a nationally renowned, incredibly dynamic speaker, three days of day-sessions and an extremely significant service project.



What were the goals/dreams of the staff and committee for Awakening?

In the initial stages, the goals/dreams were a bit abstract.

- The desire was to have something different, something that hadn’t been done before.
- They wanted to step out of the “mission” paradigm.

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One of the goals was to attempt to reach those parishioners who feel as though the Church doesn't have much to offer them, the ones who fall between the crazy cracks that are so hard to identify.

As the planning continued and time was nearing the event, Monsignor Patrick Bishop, the pastor, began reflecting more and more concerning Small Faith Sharing Groups and how the *Awakening* might hopefully lead to more people joining these small groups. As many parishes today, Transfiguration is very large, resulting in the reality that sometimes people get lost in the shuffle. Small Faith Sharing Groups provide parishioners the experience of Church in an intimate setting.

- Thus, one of the goals/dreams – and “actions” - during the *Awakening* was a slight push to grow that ministry.

Were other committees and parishioners involved in the preparations?

The Parish Life Committee was the steering committee, handling most of the work, but many details were delegated to various ministerial groups within the parish.

Two examples:

- Every evening began with a dinner. A particular ministry sponsored/prepared and cleaned up after each of those dinners.
- Second: prior to each evening session, a particular ministry would oversee all the hospitality aspects.

In reality, the list of ministries that helped was endless.

What were the events and schedule of “Mission Possible?”

Sunday

3:00 – 5:30 pm: Feeding the 5,000 (Service project to feed 5,000 people in the Marietta area)

7:00 pm: Pizza dinner following the 6:00 pm liturgy

7:30 – 9:00 pm: Awakening Presentation: “Amazing Race – Amazin’ Grace”

Break-out sessions for children

9:00 pm: Reception

Monday

10:00 am – noon: Awakening to Prayer

Workshops to experience various types of prayer:

- Prayer through Music
- Prayer with Scripture
- Centering Prayer
- Ignatian Prayer
- Adoration
- Visual Reflection

Noon: Liturgy in the chapel

6:00 pm: Light dinner

7:00 – 8:30 pm: Awakening Presentation: “Extreme Makeover”

Break-out sessions for children

8:30 pm: Reception

Tuesday

9:00 am: Liturgy in the chapel

10:00 am – noon: Awakening to Catholicism

Workshops on knowing our Catholic faith:

- How Do I answer that Question?
- Catholic Social Teaching
- Catholics and Scripture... Yes, we DO read it!
- What Do We Believe and Why Do We Believe It?

Noon – 1:00 pm: Open Mike

Open forum discussion and lunch with the *Awakening* presenter

6:00 pm: Light Dinner

7:00 – 8:30 pm: Awakening Presentation: “The Apprentice”

Break-out sessions for children

8:30 pm: Reception

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Wednesday

9:00 am: Liturgy in the chapel

10:00 am – 12:30 pm: Awakening to Justice

Workshops on issues of justice in our world today

- Human Trafficking
- Respect for All Life
- Homelessness
- Purchasing Power: How What You Buy Matters

6:00 pm: Light Dinner

7:00 – 8:30 pm: Awakening Presentation: “The Voice”

This evening presentation was for the whole family; therefore, no break-out sessions for children

8:30 pm: Reception



Why were morning workshop sessions offered during this Awakening?

During the planning period a survey was conducted, both in the pews and online, to attempt to discern the spiritual growth needs of the parishioners. When compiling the results, it was determined that most of those needs could be addressed in a workshop setting. For example, a question was asked regarding whether people were interested in learning more about their Catholic faith, sort of a *Catholicism 101*; this scored very

high on the survey. The most popular morning of workshops was on Wednesday, Awakening to Justice, in which presenters offered workshops on issues of Catholic Social Justice:

- Human Trafficking in the Metro Atlanta area
- Respecting All Life (especially Death Penalty)
- Purchasing Power, etc.

Who led the workshops sessions?

One was led by one of the deacons. All the others, depending on the topic, were facilitated by parishioners who were well-learned in their subject area; others were facilitated by experts employed in their field.

The woman who offered the session on human trafficking was appointed by former Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue to a position with the Department of Children and Families, and is currently director of Devereux Georgia in Atlanta, a treatment facility for youth who are experiencing emotional and behavioral challenges, some of whom are victims of trafficking.

http://www.devereux.org/site/PageServer?pagename=ga_index

What was the service project?

The planning committee portrays the service project as “Truly miraculous.” The goal was to feed 5,000 people. With over 400 people responding, parishioners made 2700 sandwiches (ham and cheese or turkey and cheese) and collected over 2800 non-perishables.

Everyone was involved: families with young children, teens, young adults, middle-agers, retired people; all walks of life showed up to help. The committee describes it as “joyful chaos” and shares a little tidbit on the humor of God: “Throughout the project we kept running out of bread and people kept volunteering to run to the grocery store and grab a few loaves here and a few loaves there. The volunteers were making the sandwiches so fast that the bread would run out. The other volunteers kept running to the store and back and forth and back and forth until we ran out of other supplies. We started counting and cleaning and the final numbers: 2700 sandwiches (give or take a few) and the only thing left over: bread - just like the miracle in Scripture. Needless to say, the irony of the moment and the presence of the Spirit (and God's sense of humor) weren't lost on anyone.”

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What did the breakout sessions with the children entail?

On Sunday, Monday and Tuesday evenings, children from Kindergarten through grade 6 participated in activities that were created around the evening themes for the adults.

- During the first evening, “Amazing Race? Or Amazing Grace,” the children created prayer hearts and wheels as well as making sack lunches for the “Feeding the 5000 Project” that were taken to some children on the street.
- Monday evening’s theme, “Extreme Make-over,” invited the children to have relay races, dressed in all types of old dress-up clothing. They then discussed how it doesn’t matter how we look on the outside. What matters, rather, is what’s on the inside; God loves unconditionally.
- During Tuesday evening’s theme, “The Apprentice,” our need to be Jesus’ apprentice was explored. The youngsters toured the parish Saint Vincent de Paul Food Pantry and helped sort and assemble food bags.

Each evening averaged about seventy-five children participating.

What occurred on the last evening, with families together for the session?

Wednesday evening saw the inclusion of a few items which weren’t incorporated in the other nights. The evening’s theme, “The Voice” reflected on the question, “Whose voice are we listening to?”

- A wonderful children's book, *The Voice: A Story about Faith and Trust* by R. W. Metlen (Paulist Press, 2001) was read.
- A skit was performed by a few of the parish teens.



How was the Awakening publicized; how were the people invited?

The publicity/marketing was a teaser campaign. It was rolled out very slowly, initially saying very little. It began with a simple ad on the back of the bulletin that started to build the logo and a count-down banner ad on the front that said “The Soul Awakens in 12 Weeks.” Every week it progressed just a little bit.

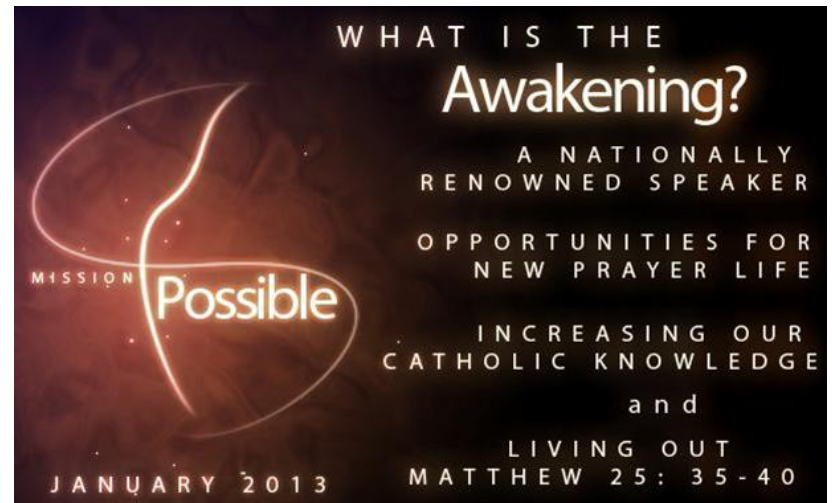
Awakening t-shirts were purchased for the staff and everyone on the committee, with several extras for the first of three Awakening Weekends.

- During the first Awakening Weekend, the first weekend in November, everyone wore their shirt as the committee began to tease people during the announcements, saying, “Save the date, the Awakening is coming.”
- A fun t-shirt giveaway took place by previously placing an Awakening sticker on one of the music programs. Everyone in the assembly was asked to look at their program; the one with the sticker received a free t-shirt.
- On each Awakening weekend there was a giveaway for the families. The first weekend was an Awakening magnet for the fridge. This created a spirit of fun, wondering and excitement; people started asking questions. They were answered simply with, “Just wait and see.”

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- Meanwhile, little items were being dropped into the website, again just teasing. The Director of Media put together an enticing informational video that the committee members took to several ministries, giving a brief presentation about what was happening and how help was needed. The goal was to communicate with all the ministries. There are over 80!
- During the second Awakening Weekend, the first weekend in December, everyone who had a t-shirt wore it including the priests and deacons. Another t-shirt giveaway, but this time it was three per Mass.
- A bit more information was shared during the announcements. The ad on the back of the bulletin was building and the count-down banner ad on the front was counting down.
- The giveaway this weekend was a CD prepared by the *Awakening* speaker. Because it was a five minute reflection on the *Awakening* and Advent – and it was short – the hope was that families would listen to it on their car CD player on the drive home from liturgy.
- The third Awakening Weekend, the first weekend in January, saw many t-shirts being worn. This time, the giveaway was five t-shirts per Mass. People began ordering them for themselves. Parish was really buzzing.
- There was no giveaway this weekend, but the brochure, with full details was given out. The schedule was also contained in the bulletin. All the information was now out; high and excited energy could be felt throughout the parish.
- Other publicity items were created:
 - a banner placed in the narthex with the logo
 - a simple banner with the white cross (shaped like a distorted figure eight) on black fabric that hung on the reardos (wall behind the altar)

- A music video was made and shown during the Awakening and on the website
- The Awakening speaker spoke at all the Masses. By that point, everyone was saying "Are you coming tonight?"



As the Awakening ended, what were some of feelings and comments from the parishioners?

- “Energizing, engaging and challenging. I particularly enjoyed hearing the teens' comments and input. Such a different perspective. The program did a great job at integrating all ages.”
- “Really hit me hard. The message about opening my eyes - acknowledging that everyone has loved, lost and struggles. I keep repeating that to myself every day.”
- “This was the best mission I think we've ever had...and I have been in the parish for 33 years. The Awakening "team" did an outstanding job. Everything came together beautifully and those four days were very uplifting. Thank you to everyone who was a part of this wonderful experience for us all.”
- “It was a great family experience for us. Thank you.”

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- “Thank you for having such a fantastic mission for this parish. We just joined a few months ago and this was exactly what we needed to get the ball rolling in getting involved. What a fantastic job the ENTIRE staff did in putting this together. You could tell it was well planned, organized, thought out and the people that volunteered wanted to be there. Just outstanding; I can't say enough good about our experience. I should have brought my parents.”
- “A great way to wrap up the evening and leave us ready to continue this awakening in our hearts and our lives. Especially outside of church, it is SO needed. The kids did a great job with the skit - I love seeing them participate and enjoy it. I wish I'd had Transfiguration church when I was a young church-goer. I might not have left the church for eight LONG years!!”
- “This was a really informative day. I wish I could have attended more of the sessions. The presentation from the director of Devereux was really great and opened my eyes quite a bit. I have a much clearer understanding of what they do and the issues with our youth that they help. The Director for Stand Up for Kids was really informative and seemed so compassionate. She gave an excellent presentation and really got everyone talking. I think we all related to her even better because her presentation was so good.”

What did the staff and committee say when it was over: about their own experience; about what they witnessed happening in/for the parishioners during the Awakening?

Kathy Montag, one of the coordinators of *Awakening*, reflectively summarizes for the staff and committee: “At the conclusion of the *Awakening*, staff and the committee were exhausted, yet standing in awe at the power of the Holy Spirit and how incredibly the Spirit moved within our parish family. No one expected the magnitude of the turnout nor the outpouring of affirmations that we received from those in attendance.

The stories that we are hearing: people returning to the church, people embracing ministry for the first time, people turning from destructive habits, seeking counsel to heal; it's been truly nothing short of miraculous. Having said that, Transfiguration is a HUGE parish. Life and

daily pastoral work is perpetual. So, after a much-needed day of rest, the staff returned with a commitment to the work of Jesus in our ministries that embed us in our own parish, the city of Marietta, across the country and abroad.



(Bulletin ad which ran in November)

As staff and committee, now that the week of Awakening has concluded and “life has gone back to normal,” do you see any changes in parishioners, in parish life?

Kathy continues to share their experiences and plans: “We are now working on incorporating the *Awakening* experience into the solemn season of Lent. One example is a change in doing Stations of the Cross. It is our tradition to offer stations every Friday. This year, on one of the Fridays we are offering a "Justice Passion Walk" which has been fashioned after Catholic Relief Services Passion Walk that incorporates the traditional stations with pictures and reflections on issues of justice in our community.

Another outgrowth from the *Awakening* is a Young Adult Ministry (YAMS) early morning bible study during Lent. Again, we are attempting to quench the parishioners' thirst for Christ that the Awakening ignited.

Another issue that we are seeing is incredible numbers of participants at events that are traditions in our parish. One example: We offer a program called Jesus and the Media (JAM) for grades 7 and 8. The evening offers a social aspect as well as a learning experience about discerning healthy choices when choosing movies, music and television. Typically, we have about 30 young people attend. This year, there were sixty.

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We are seeing larger numbers everywhere. Is this a result of the *Awakening*? We hope so. More importantly, we pray that the Holy Spirit has taken hold of Transfiguration Catholic Church, and given to us a transfigured vision of what Life in Christ really means.”

As mentioned earlier in this issue, it was the conviction of Monsignor Bishop, the pastor, that a true measure of the success of the *Awakening* would be the growth of the Small Faith Groups program, especially during Lent. He, and the entire staff believe that through small groups, people can ask deep questions and share their faith as well as, perhaps even more importantly, participants can be vulnerable with one another, bare their hurts and lift up the hurting sometimes with prayer, sometimes with hugs.

Kathy comments: “So is the ministry expanding as a result of the *Awakening*? The answer is an absolute YES. I don't have actual statistics, but the buzz is everywhere...”Which small group are you a part of?” resounds and reverberates from the narthex to Starbucks.”

Kathy continued to share a personal and tragic story about the power of small groups. “The week after the *Awakening*, a beloved staff family in our parish lost their son (age 19) in a car accident. The funeral was the most beautiful and crushing funeral that most of us have ever experienced. Imagine a packed church, over 1100 people, and probably a quarter of the attendees were teary-eyed young adults under the age of 25. Our amazing parish and these young people were doing the only thing we knew what to do: carry this family through a heart-wrenching time. This was the utmost and highest example of what God calls Church to be for this world.

What does this have to do with Small Groups? I asked the mom how her daughter was doing (after the death of her brother); her immediate response was: ‘the most amazing thing has happened to her...she decided to start her own small group.’ A result of the *Awakening*? I hope so.”

As staff and committee, what did you “learn” during this experience?

After months of reflection, Kathy, speaking for the staff and committee mentioned a few things:

- “I think the most important thing we learned was that in order to

plan such a huge undertaking, it takes over a year of planning and many minds that can work together.

- Also, those who are in leadership need to have the vision to encourage others to utilize their talents and to be able to delegate.
- A well planned and executed marketing strategy is also crucial to the success of the event.
- And, the appeal of the lead speaker is primary. The speaker – and the content/processes - must match the audience. What Transfiguration Catholic Church in Alpharetta, GA wants/needs can be dramatically different than a parish in northern Michigan, southern California, Australia or Scotland.”



(Magnets and stickers)

Will you do anything differently when the next one is planned (in three years)?

At this point, the planning committee responded: “Come up with a better parking plan.” (What a terrific “problem” to have!)



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- <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*.