



# GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

*from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study*

#36 – December 2013

## A Best Practice: One Word

In her book, *The Web in the Sea*, Alice O. Howell talks about “The Aha! Moment:”

*"When I read something that rings true and goes straight to my heart, or I hear or see it, that aha! feeling comes. I know that I am in the presence of something greater than I am."*

Those Aha! Moments also occur for me when I hear about/read about the same idea/an identical thought or exploration in multiple places, from various sources.

This issue of **GEMS** will explore one of those: an idea, a practice, that seems to be popping up all over. Might it be something that we can incorporate into our adult faith formation ministry?

This practice, a custom to help each of us grow in faith, provides the possibility of it being used by **each and every person in our parishes**.

## How to share it with others

The practical and exciting reality is that the sharing and learning of this practice can be accomplished through various delivery systems. Adult faith formation at its best! Whatever works for your parish is all that needs to be done.

People can be invited, supported and encouraged in this practice in various ways. It can be explained and explored through these ways (and probably even more):

- Face-to-face, for example:
  - Intentional adult formation gatherings to explain and explore it, for all – for anyone who chooses to gather at the parish for an adult faith formation opportunity
  - Incorporation into gatherings of existing groups: RCIA, Parish Pastoral Council and Commissions, catechists, etc.

- Virtually, for example:
  - Emails
  - The parish website and Sunday bulletin
  - The parish Facebook page

## What is this practice?

The practice we’re going to explore in this issue, **choosing and responding to “one word,”** is closely related to some treasured spiritual practices which have engaged people for centuries.

First, an ancient tradition of the church, which has regained attention and popularity in recent years, is the practice of *Lectio Divina*. There is much written about *Lectio* today. To succinctly summarize: it is a prayer practice in which we listen for the message of the Holy Spirit to us in and through the words of Scripture.

- What word or phrase touches you and your life today?
- What word or phrase jumps out for you?
- What word or phrase catches you, touches you, surprises you, comforts you, challenges you?

Second, in **Centering Prayer** we choose a sacred word/phrase as the symbol of our intention to be attentive to God’s presence and action within us. (*Open Mind, Open Heart* by Thomas Keating. Bloomsbury Academic, 2006)

This sacred word/phrase is chosen during a brief period of prayer to the Holy Spirit. Often it is suggested that the word/phrase be one or two syllables, such as: God, Jesus, Abba, Father, Mother, Mary, Amen, Love, Listen, Peace, Mercy, Let Go, Silence, Stillness, Faith, Trust.

Third, within the Native American tradition, there is a practice of the **Prayer of the Secret Word**. At the beginning of the day (or week) Native Americans listen in silence for their secret word.

In silent prayer, they quiet their bodies and minds. After welcoming the

Holy Spirit into their lives, they listen for the word that is meant to guide their life at this particular moment.

Once they have heard the word,

- they take it into their hearts in prayer
- they take it to their feet because they know they are going to walk with it all day (or all week in all that they do)

## Presence

I will be present to the people around me.  
I will be mindful of the task at hand.  
I will not live in worry and anticipation  
of the future.  
I will think of productivity,  
not as getting more done,  
but getting more focus. I will be grateful.

- Jared

<http://jareddees.com/pick-three-words-2013/>

Now, another ancient practice is gaining popularity, **choosing and living one word** for a certain period of our lives.

Beginning in the third century and continuing for another 350 years, Christian women and men had begun to leave the cities and villages of North Africa and Asia Minor, seeking time and place to deepen their relationship with God.

Those who stayed and deepened their wisdom because of their lives on the edge became known as the desert mothers and fathers, or *ammās* and *abbas*.

*Ammās* and *abbas* referred to women and men who were spiritual mothers and fathers to many. They were wise teachers who were sought out for guidance in living the Christian life. Many of the spiritual practices we hold dear today trace their roots to this movement.

As people approached these desert mothers and fathers for advice and direction, one tradition that grew up was to **ask for a word**. Some people chose to ponder and live this word for many days, for weeks or months, or, in some instances, even for their entire lifetimes.

## How do you choose a word, or let a word choose you?

In reality, people suggest various ways. Let's look at a couple of them.

In the book, *My One Word*, Mike Ashcroft and Rachel Olsen suggest these steps:

- **What kind of person do you want to become?**

“Spend a week or so reflecting on who you wish to become. Consider the condition of your heart, your character, your soul.”

- **Identify Characteristics**

“Don't just think about behaviors; think character and characteristics. In a notebook or on a piece of paper, make a list of the characteristics of the person you want to become. In other words, describe the traits and motives of a person like that.”

- **Reduce and Define**

“As you slowly gain a vision of the kind of person you want to become, you'll keep adding words and phrases to your list that capture the characteristics of that person. You might list nouns, adjectives, or verbs – ‘being’ words or ‘doing’ words. Your list will be highly personal and unique. It may even contain words that only make sense to you.

Once you feel you've completed the process, pray, look over your list, and begin marking off all but ten or so of the words. Remove the ones that resonate the least with you.

Once you have your short list, write a brief description of what those words mean to you. Look them up in the dictionary. Note their definitions. Look up their synonyms. And look them up in the Bible.

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In this stage of the process, you may find a related word you like better than the ones on your list ... write it down.

Pray. Ask God to guide you and give you the clarity of thought and mind as you spend a few days thinking over your short list.

Weigh each word and the implication it might have on your life. See if one of them manages to rise to the top. Ask God to bring one to the forefront.”

- **Pick your Word**

“...pick your word from the list. ... In order to concentrate on one thing, we’re going to push others to the back burner for now.”

My word is a PEACE acrostic

Pray always  
Eat carefully  
Act for God’s best  
Care for others and self  
Ease into peace everlasting

- Judy

<http://abbeyofthearts.com/blog/2012/12/17/give-me-a-word-2013-fourth-annual-abbey-giveaway/comment-page-32/#comments>

Christine Valters Paintner (author and blogger at [Abbey of the Arts](#)) invites people to **let a word choose them**.

Christine explains what that means:

- “It means releasing your thinking mind and expectations. If you are thinking of New Year’s resolutions and what word will be most motivating for you to lose those last ten pounds, this is not what we’re talking about.”

- “It means surrendering into a place of deep trust and receptivity. ... what if I let go of the need to find something for myself and opened myself to receive what comes?”
- “If you find yourself obsessing over the ‘right’ word, it is time to breathe and let go.”
- “For some ... the word may come right away, but some may find the process much slower. Trust that perhaps it is the waiting itself that is offering itself ... as wisdom and practice.”
- “The word comes as gift. .... The word (or phrase) is one that will work in you (rather than you working on it.)

In various places, [Abbey of the Arts](#) and *Lectio Divina: Transforming Words and Images into Heart-Centered Prayer* (Skylight Paths Publishing, 2011), Christine suggests **methods for being open to let a word choose you**. A few of them are:

- Listen and be aware. It might be right there.
- Pay attention to resistance. “...a word that creates inner resistance is as important to pay attention to as one that has a great deal of resonance.”
- Use the process of *Lectio Divina* and apply it to experience, just as it is applied to Scripture.
  - “Allow some time for prayer and in your imagination review this last year, honoring it as a sacred text.
  - As you walk through your experiences notice which ones stand out, call to you for more attention....”
  - “There may be more than one, but for this time of prayer select one of them....”
  - “Enter into it with all your senses.
  - Allow the word to unfold in your imagination and welcome in images, feelings and memories....”
- Approach a soul friend, a spiritual director for a word, as in the desert tradition.

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- Take a few hours for retreat, reflection and quiet. Spend time journaling; write about your dreams and desires for the year ahead. Is there a word that bubbles up?
- In the book, *Finding Beauty in a Broken World* (Vintage Books, 2009) Terry Tempest Williams goes to the sea and asks, “Give me one wild word.” Go for a contemplative walk, one in which you aren’t trying to get anywhere. Listen to creation; does a word come from the created world?
- Listen to your dreams. Do you remember anything when you wake up that gives you a word?
- Pay attention to synchronicities throughout the day. “Are there images or words which seem to repeat themselves?”

This year my word is REFLECT.  
I wanted a word that would help me be  
more consistent in reflecting on God’s Word  
with quiet times, prayer, and journaling,  
and this seemed like the perfect fit.

Then while I was standing in front of a mirror  
I had an ah-ha moment.  
I realized that my word could also mean  
to reflect God’s image in this world more effectively.  
That is when I realized I had found my word.

- Chris  
*My One Word* by Mike Ashcraft and Rachel Olsen

## How do we allow the word to grow, to deepen?

Once a word has come to you, or you have chosen it, practitioners have suggested various ways to keep it before you, numerous ways to allow it to expand and intensify.

Mike Ashcroft and Rachel Olsen in *My One Word* (Zondervan, 2012), enumerate many methods to have “our word” always in our awareness:

- “I write my word on an index card and place it in a visible spot like the visor of my car or the junk drawer in our kitchen. I know that last one sounds funny, but that drawer contains odds and ends that I need throughout the day every day. – Holly”
- “I always print my word and frame it, then put it somewhere in my home where I’ll see it often. I also post it on the wall right above my computer at work. Literally keeping my word in front of my face is a great way for me to be constantly cognizant of applying it in my life. – Emily”
- “Tape it to your mirror or dashboard.
- Make it your computer password.
- Write it into your social media bio.
- Tweet it once a week.
- Are you on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, or other social media sites? Make your one word your status update. Add it to your profile descriptions. Make it your profile pic. Announce it to your followers and give them permission to periodically ask you how your one word is going.
- Spread the word about ...your chosen word! The more your friends and family participate in this movement, the more your tribe will talk about it, and the more it will be brought to your mind.”

June Mears Driedger, a blogger, shares some of her suggestions at [june mears driedger - Trust](#), one of them an acrostic poem for her word, Trust:

“Trembling I grasp hold of I know not what  
Releasing what I need to leave behind, what I have gripped onto  
for too long

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Understanding that releasing is the way  
Sustaining me as I move toward the invitation  
Trembling with anticipation for what will come, what will be.”

(<http://junemearsdriedger.wordpress.com/2013/01/09/trust-my-word-for-2013/>)

Christine Valters Painter also shares some ideas:

- “Illustrate the word visually. ... Go on a photo pilgrimage which is essentially a contemplative walk with a camera. Hold the word in your heart and look for images to receive along the way which somehow speak to its meaning. Try not to figure this out, but allow the images to find you.”
- “Once a word has chosen you, consider if there is a spiritual practice which would help you to tend its unfolding in your soul for the year ahead.... Keep it simple. It may be something like allowing five minutes each morning to ... letting this word be a mantra or anchor for your awareness.”

My words for 2013 are “let go” –  
let go of hurt feelings, anger, and regret.  
Let go of the past ... and live each day  
as it comes  
with gratitude for all the blessings  
God gives me.

- Carol

<http://abbeyofthearts.com/blog/2012/12/17/give-me-a-word-2013-fourth-annual-abbey-giveaway/comment-page-32/#comments>

## Some reflections from various people on their experiences of choosing a word:

- [Give Me a Word!](#)
- [One Word by Dan Britton, Jimmy Page, and Jon Gordon](#)
- [Only One Word](#)

- [Pick Three Words for 2013](#)

Reflect. Reverse. Remember. I guess that is what my word MIRROR really encompasses.

*Reflect:* In all ways this year, I will strive to reflect the image of Christ.

*Reverse:* Like a reflection in a mirror – the image is in reverse. This year I want to do the reverse of how I would have normally reacted in situations where I have been less than Christlike.

*Remember:* I want to remember that when I speak, my words might say one thing but my expressions might say another, so I want to act as if I am speaking into a mirror, so my expressions are always kind in nature.

- Jim

*My One Word* by Mike Ashcraft and Rachel Olsen

## The wide use of this process

There are also various people who are using this approach for their professional and/or business life. Although it seems not to be a spirituality approach, we can gain insights from their methods also:

- [My 3 Words for 2012](#)
- [Three words for 2012](#)
- [The Three Words for 2013](#)
- [My 3 Words For 2013](#)
- [Menu, Build and Minimize in 2013](#)

## A Wondering GEM

Might this one word approach be a way to integrate our lives? Could our one word guide the whole year: our New Year's resolutions, our Lenten practices?

## A GEMS Suggestion

In encouraging and empowering our parishioners in the use of this one word approach, might there be a way for a "group" to also find their own word:

- Spouses
- Families
- The Parish Pastoral Council
- RCIA sponsors



## Golden Nuggets From You

"Thank you, Sr. Janet. This [\(GEMS #13\)](#) was excellent and an idea that has been well developed and a suggested response that is very thorough. I will be bringing it to the attention of my pastor as well as the staff members involved in helping the bereaved..."

*-Vicki Hawkins, Director of Faith Formation,  
Nativity Catholic Church, Brandon, FL*

"I have been working on putting together some guidelines for a ministry of Greeters as part of our parish Hospitality ministry. One of the best resources I have found is [GEMS #3-#9](#) though I have pursued many other directions.

I have a question however about the suggestions you have included in some of the GEMS such as [GEMS #18](#), page 3 at the bottom right corner where you have a list of things under "See:." Are those topics we might Google or otherwise search on the internet or do they direct us to some

other place?

I appreciate your support in helping our parish be a place Jesus finds welcoming and peaceful.

*Terry Humenik, Parish Nurse,  
Catholic Community of St. Jude, DeWitt MI*

**Response to Terry's question:** Terry, these are websites that are hyperlinked here in the newsletter. All you need to do is click on the hyperlink and it will take you to the website.

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



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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://www.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.*