



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

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A Best Practice: Blessing of Bikes

This practice, from the Archdiocese of Portland in Oregon, combines and responds to two needs within all human persons:

- The ritualization and celebration of everyday life events
- The reverence of blessing

The ritualization and celebration of everyday life events

“A rite of passage is a ritual enacted by a group to mark the passage of one or more people through a significant life cycle.” (Arnold Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, 1960)

“Important life transitions, like birth, marriage, sickness, healing, death, and burial, are more than *mere events*. They are *transition times in life* and need to be ritualized by rites of passage which connect them to a deeper source of energy or power (G. Van Deer Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, 1963, pp. 192–193).

In the light and reverence of blessing
a person or situation
becomes illuminated
in a completely new way.

- John O'Donahue in
To Bless the Space Between Us

Fr. Bob Hater, in *Journeys of Discovery: Transitions, Rites of Passage, and the Sacramental Life of Faith* (Twenty-Third Publications) asks: “Why are rites of passage significant? Rooted in life, the endless cycle of coming and going, birth and death, success and failure are part of nature’s laws. They touch life’s creative energies.

To walk in harmony with life, we must move with the rhythms established by God for nature’s good ordering. The ordering of nature requires us to live according to creation’s laws. Plant, animal, and human

harmony and the endless cycle of birth and death manifest these laws. From them, we learn fundamental attitudes concerning life, which root the dynamics inherent in every culture.”

At first glance, the blessing of bikes might not seem to be in the same



category as life transitions, such as birth, marriage, sickness, healing, death, and burial. Yet, as we explore this practice, we’ll notice **the meanings and connections of everyday life, faith, and community support.**

The reverence of blessing

The website of the diocese of San Jose reminds us: “Every moment, joyful or painful, ordinary or amazing, is an opportunity for a blessing. To bless is to praise God always. To bless is to know that with God, ‘no thought of ours is left unguarded, no tear unheeded, no joy unnoticed’ (collect for 5th Sunday in Ordinary Time). To bless is to commit ourselves to co-operate with God’s blessings. To bless is to pray unceasingly.”

<http://www.dsj.org/being-catholic/worship/blessings-for-the-domestic-church>

Blessings are called “sacramentals” because they prepare us to receive the grace of the sacraments and dwell in the sacramentality of all life, helping us to grow to be more like Christ (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, # 1670).

The U.S. bishops (<http://uscgb.org/prayer-and-worship/blessings/objects/>) remind us that we not only bless persons, but we also bless objects: “We bless objects for many reasons.

- Blessed icons or other images or objects in the household to use as a part of regular prayer

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- Tools or objects that provide an occasion to give thanks and recognize the joy and responsibility of human labor, recreation, and devotion
- A vehicle that makes it possible to overcome distance and come together for meetings, visits, and other forms of social contact
- Boats and other vehicles that are essential to our livelihood and to protect those who use them”

The blessing of bikes

With these realities in mind, the parish of St. Mary's Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception and the Archdiocese of Portland's Department of Evangelization hosted their sixth annual “Blessing of Bikes” in June 2013.

Deacon Thomas Gornick, Director of Evangelization for the archdiocese and a member of the Cathedral parish, said:

“Portland is a platinum cycling city. Cyclists and cycling make many significant contributions to our community. ...

The Catholic community and the parish values and raises up the contribution that cyclists make to the community and the environment. Cycling in Portland contributes a significant element to our cultural mosaic.



The cyclists bring a special life to our neighborhood and city whether they ride for recreation, commuting or competition. ...

Cyclists are represented in all parts of our community; they are members of the parish and staff; they attend our services. St. Mary's is bounded by the bike lanes on 18th Avenue and Everett Street; many cyclists daily pass our church.”

Hence, each year the cathedral parish and the archdiocese invite everyone to bring their bikes and celebrate the many miles ridden each day.

History of the event

The Portland Bike Blessing has been held each June since 2008 with cyclists coming from around the metro area. The gatherings have included:

- members of the family of cyclists who died the previous year
- City of Portland Office of Transportation
- leaders from the cycling community
- officers from the Portland Bureau of Police

The blessing brings together first timers, people of faith and no faith. Some make this an annual event to mark the start of summer.

“The Catholic community has a long tradition of recognizing the cyclist,” says Deacon Gornick, a regular bike commuter. On October 13, 1949, Pope Pius XII formally named Our Lady of Ghisallo as the patroness of cyclists. The chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Ghisallo is located at the top of a steep hill in the Lake Como region of Italy. An eternal flame burns at the chapel in memory of those cyclists who have died.”

Medieval legend says that Count Ghisallo was travelling near the village of Magrèglio when he was attacked by highway bandits.

Spotting an image of the Virgin Mary in a roadside shrine, he broke away from his attackers and ran to it. There he took refuge, pleading for Our Lady's protection and was miraculously saved from the robbers.

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As the story spread, the Madonna del Ghisallo became known as patroness of local travelers. In more recent times, cyclists would often stop to rest and pray at the chapel, which is a local landmark, and is at the top of a steep hill.



After World War II, Father Ermelindo Vigano, pastor at the shrine, proposed Ghisallo as the site of an Italian shrine for bicyclists, and she was given as patroness of cyclists on October 13, 1949 by Pope Pius XII.

The chapel has become equal part religious shrine, part cycling museum, with artifacts and photos from the sport. There is an eternal flame that burns there in memory of cyclists who are no longer with us, and services each Christmas Even and the Feast of All Souls commemorate them. The *Museo del ciclismo* is also on the site.

Sources:

- <http://saints.sqpn.com/madonna-del-ghisallo/>
- <http://www.museodelghisallo.it/>

The Ritual for the Celebration

The prayer service at the cathedral in Portland, Oregon contains prayers, a Scripture reading, intercessions and the blessing of the bicycles with holy water.



The opening prayer gathers everyone together:

May the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life, be with you all.

Response: And also with you.

Christ, the Son of God, came into the world to gather those who were scattered. Whatever contributes to bringing us closer together therefore is in accord with God's plan. Thus those who are separated from each other by mountains, rivers, or great distances are brought nearer to each other whenever new means to connect us are created.

Let us, then, call on God to bless those who have worked on bicycles, roads, bike paths and other projects to bring people together and to protect with his gracious help those who will make use of roads, paths, bicycles and all means of transportation.

The Scripture reading which is often used for the service is Ezekiel 1: 15-21 with the Responsorial Psalm taken from Psalm 25:4-5, 9-10, 12-13.

The Prayer of Blessing included:

All-powerful God,
Creator of heaven and earth,
in the rich depths of your wisdom
you have empowered us to produce great and beautiful works.
grant, we pray, that those who use these bicycles
may travel safely and with care for the safety of others.
whether they travel for leisure, sport or business,
let them always find the Lord to be their companion on the journey,
who lives and reigns for ever and ever.

Response: Amen

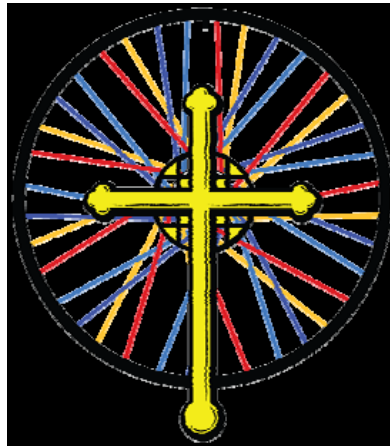
Blessing: May the Lord be the guide on our journeys, so that you may ride in peace, arrive safe at the end of the day and reach eternal life.

Remembering during the Ritual

The ritual also includes (if necessary) a remembering and prayer for those who were killed in fatal bike accidents within the past year, as well as for the healing of anyone who was injured while cycling in the area.

This bicycle wheel comes from Sheldon Brown's web article on wheel building. Sheldon Brown was an avid cyclist who died in February 2008.

(<http://www.sheldonbrown.com/wheelbuild.html>)



Blessings of Bikes throughout the country

The tradition of blessing of bikes is taking place in multiple places throughout the country these days. Two of them:

- The Annual Blessing of the Bikes at The Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine in New York City, NY
<http://theblessingofthebikes.com/>
- Blessing of the Bicycles: A Multi-Faith Event for All Cyclists, Good Samaritan Hospital, Los Angeles, CA
<http://blessingofthebicycles.wordpress.com/>

Some GEMS Suggestions

- In looking for blessings for bikes (and many other blessings), consult:
 - *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers*. United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, 2007.
 - *Book of Blessings: Approved for Use in the Dioceses of the United States*. Liturgical Press, 1989.
- What does your parish and or (arch)diocese do to commemorate and celebrate life transitions, e.g. birth, marriage, graduation, driver's license, retirement, sickness, healing, death, and burial?

- What other "everyday events, happenings and objects" (in addition to bikes) do you or might you celebrate and bless? For example:
 - [Blessing of Boats, Gloucester, MA](#)
- When you celebrate life's transitions or everyday events with parishioners, how do you follow-up? How do you stay in touch with, continue to support, and share faith with the participants?
- What are some feast days which would be conducive to blessings; for instance:
 - St. Isidore of Seville (April 4), Patron Saint of Computers and the Internet
 - St. Florian (May 4), Patron Saint of firefighters
 - St. Michael (September 29), Patron Saint of police
- In addition to blessing bikes, why not connect with some of the local/national *Recycle your Bicycle* programs which provide bikes to youth and/or adults for whom bicycles might be the only viable way to get to work, school or the grocery store?



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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 Go to Adult Formation: *Nuts & Bolts: Planning and Best Practices for Adult Formation*.