



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

42 – June 2014

A Best Practice: An Offering with Many Successful Components

In many ways, at first glance, this best practice looks like many that are happening all the time throughout our parishes and (arch)dioceses: a speaker series (on an important topic!).

At the same time, it deserves a closer look for there are several features (best practices) woven in and throughout which – when practiced – can have **an impact upon a variety of our adult faith formation opportunities**, for instance:

- The initiating and sponsoring group is larger than one parish
- The vast variety of marketing and publicity endeavors
- The availability of follow-up online resources
- The advantages of having the speakers be part of the planning team
- The strength of working as a team – and the challenges

Who sponsored this program?

[St. Joseph Educational Center](#) has been in existence since 1972, serving as an adult faith education center. This center serves twenty-three parishes in the Des Moines region, one of the four regions in the diocese of Des Moines, Iowa.

The goal of the Center is to help to foster in adults a mature Catholic faith that is living, explicit and fruitful (*General Directory for Catechesis*, #66; *Our Hearts Were Burning within Us*, #50-63). The Center offers tools to help regional parishes build and grow their adult faith formation ministries.

All of the events of [St. Joseph Educational Center](#) (SJEC) are held in/hosted by regional parishes. With the program we will be looking at in this issue, SJEC partnered with the two parishes where the event was held on two different evenings.

Thus, this offering was co-sponsored by [St. Joseph Educational Center](#), Holy Trinity Parish, Des Moines and Sacred Heart Parish, West Des Moines.

What was the program?

Over 200 people participated in an evening program, [What Would Francis Do? A Pope, A Council Full of Surprises](#) (with online follow up resources), which was offered on two different evenings in two different locations.



Participants explored how Pope Francis is modeling a life inspired by the Second Vatican Council, showing us firsthand how our faith can grow throughout our lives.

This program was also an opportunity for people to discover anew how Vatican II continues to impact us today, how its teachings lead us to a more abundant life, and how the story of Vatican II is part of the faith story of each one of us.

The five reflective talks which were presented each of the two nights were:

- Vatican II: A Spirit-Led Church

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- You, Me, Jesus and the Church: Shared Responsibility (the Vatican II document *Lumen Gentium*)
- An Encounter with Love: Christ in the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*)
- Scriptures, Church, Life: Surprising Encounters with Christ (*Dei Verbum*)
- Joy and Hope (*Gaudium et Spes*)

What was the plan for follow-up for the two offerings?

From the onset of planning, strategies were in place to have the event videotaped so that people who could not attend would still be able to access the information. (Live streaming was explored, but the logistics did not work out for this offering.)

At the same time, a two-part follow-up promotional plan was created:

- for those who attended
- for those who were not able to attend

In reality, then, the actual participant numbers were not accessible at the close of actual event. The website was monitored to determine how many people visited, how many viewed the videos. The “final” number may never be totally determined since people will have accesses to the program via the online videos as long as these resources remain on the website.

To view the talks and handouts, see [What Would Francis Do? A Pope, A Council Full of Surprises](#).

Where did the idea for this program originate?

The idea was initiated by a group of pastors who serve on the board of directors for [St. Joseph Educational Center](#).

The original thought was to host an event or provide a resource surrounding the 50th anniversary of Vatican II that would help the Council be on the “front burner” for parishes.

Due to a new staff assignment at SJEC the idea was tabled for a while to allow for some transition time. Then, when the date was nearing for the 50th anniversary of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (December 4, 1963), a team of five speakers from the region, experts on the four constitutions from the Second Vatican Council, was recruited.

The planning involved the speakers

Often a parish (region or diocese) assesses their needs, creates a program with goals and topics and then invites a speaker(s) to address the decided-upon theme(s).

In this endeavor, rather than simply invite the speakers to show up for the event, they were asked to become part of the event planning team that helped create and develop a vision and objectives for the event.

In addition to the five speakers, representatives from each of the parishes where the event was to be held were invited to join the team. The team met twice to:

- solidify the vision and objectives
- identify the primary and secondary audience groups
- agree upon an event format and deliverables to be used for the event and for follow up resources

The team also worked together to create a development plan and a promotional plan.

After these original meetings, the team met once or twice a month to:

- review the status of the plan
- do peer reviews of the talks
- have an event “dry run” at one of the parishes

The team meetings had planned agendas and meeting notes were used to update the event planning worksheet which was the team’s guiding document. The first planning meeting was in November; the “dry run” was two weeks before the event in late February.

In the face of
an exponentially accelerated pace of change,
the future of innovation lies not with
solitary brilliant leaders
or with rigid hierarchies
but with a fluid constellation of teams.

Bill Drayton

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What were the advantages of using this team approach? Any disadvantages?

The primary advantage of using this team approach was that the event itself was cohesive, with fairly smooth transitions from speaker to speaker. All of the presentation visuals were merged together into one presentation for a consistent look.

Secondarily, as the speakers were part of the planning team, they were better informed about the audience and objectives. Each of the speakers was also a “word of mouth” promoter, having the opportunity to invite those in their circle of influence to participate in the event.

The primary disadvantage to using this team approach was that the speakers were all very busy people who had their own full-time responsibilities outside of this project. The first creative brainstorming session was also a bit difficult for everyone, primarily because the team had just formed and then immediately began with the difficult creative challenge of deciding on a theme, focus, and title for the event.

(We will return to more ideas about this planning team later on in this issue – since it has the possibility of being a significant learning – and approach – for all of us as we continue the ministry of adult formation.)

How was this program publicized?

Each time the planning team met, they reviewed their promotional plan which was a multi-thronged approach:

- Save the date notices
- Flyer with complete information
- Websites (SJEC, parishes, diocese)
- Facebook
- E-newsletters
- Blogs
- Radio spots
- Diocesan paper
- Press releases and bulletin notices

Various notices went to the usual groups who would pass the word: pastors, adult faith formation leaders, catechetical leaders, deacons, bulletin

leaders. The event was also promoted to various niche groups: RCIA teams, Scripture Study groups, Young Adult groups, etc., using the master database and email distribution lists of SJEC.



Who participated? Why do you think people were attracted?

While the event was planned to primarily draw people’s attention to the 50th anniversary of Vatican II and its four main constitutions, the fact that each of the speakers gave a personal reflection, tying that to how Pope Francis is living out Vatican II, was the real attraction.

Over 200 people from more than twenty parishes participated in the two evenings. While the plans and publicity endeavored to attract young adults, the participants were mainly people 50+.

- They were both parish leaders (staff and volunteer) as well as
- “people in the pew.”

The second night of the event did have a table of young adults who came together and sat together.

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Was an evaluative process used: with the participants; with the planning team?

In addition to informal conversations with participants after the event, comment cards were used to ascertain what people learned and found useful about the program/process. Over 60% of the attendees completed the cards.

When the planning team met for evaluation, they reviewed the comments from the participants. Their self-assessment of the positives and negatives of the event lined up closely with the participants' comments.

What did people say about their experience?

- Brought great discussion thoughts to think about. What I can do to spread the word, the mission.
- First real understanding of Vatican II's teaching of more than just the liturgical changes.
- Great connection between Vatican II and Pope Francis. Wonderful handouts with talking points and resources.
- My paradigm of Vatican II was a bunch of wild ideas – not anymore!
- It reminded me how Vatican II has changed my life; I live my religion as opposed to just going to Mass each Sunday.
- How Vatican II is continuing to unfold and how it affects our lives in a very personal way.
- Very enlightening and found peace with the leadership of our amazing Pope.
- I learned about a few of the documents of Vatican II. I am interested in learning more about them and how the Church will carry out the precepts.
- The story of the Council does not lie behind us, but before us.

Comments from the participants which illustrate the desire of people for on-going learning

More on Vatican II

More in-depth discussions on the documents of Vatican II

Make it a 5-part series to further explore the Second Vatican Council

It would be interesting now to flesh out the topics with different speakers

Have speaker notes before the event

More time for conversation and reflection

What were the factors that made this initiative successful?

Faye Akers, program development coordinator for St. Joseph Educational Center, reflected on the experience from her vantage point:

- *The timing:* Late February just prior to Lent; promoting it as a pre-Lenten opportunity and offered follow up resources for people to use during Lent
- *The title:* Pope Francis is in the minds and hearts of people. Just Vatican II probably would not have been as successful.
- *The speakers:* People who were passionate about their topics (each focused on one constitution)
- *The wide variety of promotional efforts:* radio, print, e-mail, social media, personal invitation, etc.
- *The extensive planning and follow-through*

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The experience of the planning team

A few days after the event, the planning team met for an evaluation meeting. They used [Toward Effective Adult Faith Formation \(Top Ten Guidelines and Top Ten Pitfalls\)](#) to assess how well they met their objectives and the needs of the adults who participated.

Each team member also had the opportunity to share his or her thoughts on the event planning process as well as the event itself.

- One team member mentioned that, for him, it was a struggle to work as part of a team and participate in peer reviews.
- Some team members remarked that the entire process was quite a bit of work when looked at from the perspective that their own involvement/presentation was a 10-minute talk and participation in a 20-minute Q&A session.
- Other team members enjoyed the process and felt that, despite the work involved, the end result was a very high quality event which met or exceeded most of the team's agreed upon goals and objectives and exceeded their expectations for the number of participants.

Throughout this evaluative discussion (which in itself was a learning experience for everyone), all realized that the event would have been very different:

- less cohesive
- more difficult transitions from speaker to speaker and element to element

if they had not met once a month for six months to plan and implement the event.

Amid this realization of the strengths and advantages of team planning, many of the team members also realized that collaboration, working together as a team, can be stretching and challenging.

A few weeks after this evaluation meeting, Faye had the opportunity to read the article [The Value of Working in Teams](#) which sheds some light on the challenge of working together: many clergy, many in pastoral ministry,

have lived in an individualistic society; have been trained “for ministry to be a solo sport.”

Thus, a first **Wondering GEM** is an adaptation of the question at the conclusion of the article: *What would it look like to prepare and encourage clergy and pastoral staff members to practice ministry as a team sport?* Perhaps one step is to begin to do it: look for opportunities to not go it alone, but to work together.

- What type of planning teams do you have for your adult faith formation ministry?
- What helps your staff and your parish teams, commissions and committees to work cohesively together?

More Wondering GEMS

- **How might you plan adult faith formation opportunities in conjunction with significant anniversaries**, for example:
 - the anniversary of the promulgation of [Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World \(Gaudium et Spes\)](#)
 - the anniversary of the US Bishops' document, [The Challenge of Peace](#)
 - the anniversary of [Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium](#)
 - the anniversary of [Co-Workers in the Vineyard](#)
- Faye indicated that the timing was a key factor for the success of this endeavor. In your parish (arch)diocese, **how do you determine the best timing (for the participants) for various programs?**
- SJEC and the parishes utilized various methods and tools for marketing and publicity.
 - **What marketing techniques work best for your parish, region or (arch)diocese?**
 - **Are there new methods which you might utilize?**
 - Even though this was a program on Vatican II, the content (and publicity) was also linked to the life and ministry of Pope Francis. **How might you make connections with your**

offerings to other current events or items of interest of your parishioners?

- This event – and the participants’ comments – indicates that, even though Vatican II happened fifty-two years ago, it is still relevant today. People want to know more. **How might your parish help people to understand and go deeper into the riches of the Second Vatican Council?**



Golden Nuggets From You

“Great GEMS (#27) this month (as always)! Thanks for all that you do to promote adult faith formation.”

As I was reading the part about determining the needs of the people for adult faith formation, I thought of something I have used many times in talking to religious educators and members of adult faith formation committees. Basically, it goes something like this:

When determining where to start in your parish regarding adult faith formation, it is often wise to distinguish between two different types of needs:

Perceived Needs: These are things that adults will admit that they need, from an intellectual perspective. For example, your adult members might say: ‘I could use some additional information regarding the history of the church.’ This type of need is something that the adult may never feel truly motivated to act upon. While it is great to offer programs in this area, don’t expect much participation until people begin to appreciate what you have to offer in this regard, and how it can truly impact their lives.

Felt Needs: Felt needs come from deep in the heart (or the gut) of the individual. Here is an example: ‘I am a parent who is struggling to raise my children well and instill in them a sense of the importance of faith. Lately I have started to feel like I am losing them or at least losing my effectiveness as a good parent.’ This “felt need” is actually a cry for help. Don’t let this

invitation from your adult member go without a response. Chances are this person is expressing a crucial need that many people are ‘feeling’ and would love to have some help with. They would greatly appreciate being able to receive expert assistance from their parish. Make this a priority when planning adult faith formation.

Again, there is always the issue of ‘balance.’ Don’t ignore the perceived needs of the parish but make sure you are first addressing the felt needs. Often times, you can use the forum created by people responding to a felt need to introduce the logical connection to a perceived need. For example, when you have parents in the room for parenting sessions, you can use that opportunity to weave in the importance of the sacraments or Sacred Scripture for parents who are developing good Christian Parenting skills.

Thanks, Janet! Your GEMS newsletter really served to fire up the neurons in my brain.”

- Bill Miller, President of NCCL; Former Director of the Office for Catechetics, Diocese of Cleveland, OH



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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://www.ecatechist.com/ebooks/> Scroll down 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.*