



# GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

*from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study*

#43 - July 2014

## Insights that Spark Some Reflections on Adult Faith Formation

This issue provides some reflection for our summertime. Below you will find a diversity of thoughts and insights taken from current books and periodicals. As you read them, wonder: what does this say about the ministry of adult faith formation today?

Included are some beginning wonderings, questions, and suggestions. Take time to ponder your own wonderings, to share ideas, suggestions and questions with your colleagues, perhaps to renew and/or incorporate new practices into your adult faith formation efforts. Enjoy.



### Ideas that Stick

Chip Heath and Dan Heath suggest six principles of successful ideas for marketing and adult faith formation:

- “Simplicity. A successful defense lawyer says, ‘If you argue ten points, even if each is a good point, when they get back to the jury room they won’t remember any.’ To strip an idea down to its core, we must be masters of exclusion. We must relentlessly prioritize. ...sound bites are not the ideal. Proverbs are the ideal.
- Unexpectedness. For our idea to endure, we must generate *interest* and *curiosity*. We can engage people’s curiosity over a long period of time by systematically ‘opening gaps’ in their knowledge – and then filling those gaps.
- Concreteness. We must explain our ideas in terms of human actions, in terms of sensory information. ... Naturally sticky ideas are full of concrete images because our brains are wired to remember concrete data.
- Credibility. We need ways to help people test our ideas for themselves – a “try before you buy” philosophy for the world of ideas.

- Emotions. How do we get people to care about our ideas? We make them *feel* something. ... We are wired to feel things for people, not for abstractions. Sometimes the hard part is finding the right emotion to harness.
- Stories. Hearing stories acts as a kind of mental flight simulator, preparing us to respond more quickly and effectively.”  
- *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die* by Chip Heath and Dan Heath (Random House, 2007)

## Some Wondering GEMS

- Simplicity: Do we ever feel: but there is so much to share, to explore; we have to fit in all ten points? Really, does it all need to be done in one session? Are there ways to continue the conversation; perhaps face-to-face; perhaps virtually, through many forms of today’s social media and technology?
- Interest and curiosity: The principles of adult faith formation tell us that all adult learning begins with people’s experiences; adults bring much experience to their new learnings. While respecting and calling forth their experience, how do we gently ‘open gaps’ in their knowledge?
- Concrete images: How are concrete images – realistic, specific and tangible – used throughout our adult faith formation presentations and materials?
- Credibility: Is the “so what” question a part of all adult faith formation - “So what does this mean for my everyday life?” Then, do we encourage people to live, to try out the new ideas, in their lives, in their faith journeys?
- Stories: What kinds of stories are shared within adult faith formation opportunities? Who shares the stories?

# GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED



## Life's Many Endings and Exits

"I certainly believe the art of attending to, practicing, ritualizing, and developing a language for leave-taking in the most ordinary moments and setting augers well for taking on the more extraordinary exits the life is sure to serve up. ...

Our societal neglect of the rituals and purposes of exits is not only a puzzling contemporary phenomenon; it is also strange when we consider the history of our country – a history that has been primarily defined by leave-takings, departures, and journeys away from home. ...

How might we find ways of reframing our exits, giving them the attention and significance they are due? Are there steps to take, routines to be practiced, discerning questions to be posed to make our departures more bearable, revelatory, and generative? Are there rituals we might invent to light a clearer path toward the exit? Are there institutional arrangements and norms, ceremonial events, a new language and way of seeing that would encourage a different approach and attitude toward leave-takings?"

- *Exit: The Endings that Set Us Free* by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot  
(Sarah Crichton Books, 2012)

## Some GEMS Suggestions

- All research concerning adult faith formation indicates that people learn best, people grow in their faith, during the transition times of life. How do our parishes walk with people during endings and exits, for instance:
  - Newly marrieds
  - Parents for the first time
  - New home
  - Losing a job/beginning a new job
  - Sandwich generation (still raising children-caring for aging parents)
  - Empty nesters
  - Retirement
  - Changes in parish life
  - The merging, closing or clustering of parishes
  - Responding to people (family members, friends, parishioners) who have left the church

- In addition to support groups and informational sessions, do we also incorporate and celebrate rituals for these beginnings, endings, exits?
- "...consider that history of our country – a history that has been primarily defined by leave-takings, departures, and journeys away from home..." What about the history of our faith, the stories of our faith journey: Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar; Moses and the Israelite people; Mary and Joseph; the apostles....? How are their stories and witness of exits and endings connected to our stories throughout our various adult faith formation opportunities?



## Conversion and *Metanoia*

"It may seem as if religion is on a trajectory unstoppable change, but genuine spiritual change does not result from historical determinism. Spiritual awakening is not ultimately the work of invisible cultural forces. Instead, it is the work of learning to see differently, of prayer, and of conversion. It is something people do. Awakening is the result of what New Testament writers referred to as *metanoia*, a change of perspective and outlook that moves human beings beyond chaos toward a new harmony with God and divine things. ...

Ancient Christians, such as the writer of the influential second century text, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, defined *metanoia* as "the great understanding" or the practice of discernment through which human beings move from darkness toward the light. ...

... *metanoia* is a "Great Turning" or a "Great (Re)Turning toward the divine intention of harmony, unity, peace, dignity, and joy for all creation.

The new spiritual awakening rehearses paradise, the awareness of love's liberating and healing power. God is with us in this world. Awakening is, of course, something transcendent. But awakening is also something that individuals can choose to participate in, can ask others to join, can ignore, can reject, or can stop. When enough people experience *metanoia*, our sense of whose we are, what we are to do, and how we understand God changes."

- *Christianity After Religion* by Diana Butler Bass (HarperOne, 2012)

# GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

## Some Questioning GEMS

- The purpose of learning is to see differently, the purpose of adult faith formation is to lead people to prayer, and to walk with them in the journey of conversion.
  - Do our programs/offerings “tell” people how to see differently or do we provide times so they might experience it?
  - How do we walk with people on the road to conversion? What practical steps/opportunities do we provide?
- “Individuals can choose to participate ... can ignore, can reject, or can stop.” How do we respond when people ignore, reject, or walk away?



## The Power of Community

“The transition from ‘me’ to ‘we’ is deeply healing to ourselves and our surroundings. Americans have always looked for great wisdom in individual heroes, and we’ve been disappointed when those heroes are all too human. But wisdom is not an individual characteristic; rather, it emerges from conversations between people about what is most important in their lives. In this sense, whenever we join with others to approach our situation honestly, we begin to create wisdom for our community.

Nebraskan Leo Kovar invented the phrase ‘the whoosh factor’ to describe the momentum and creativity that his writing group inspired in its members. ‘Whoosh’ suggests that when people come together, they can accomplish more than they can by individual actions. With this transformation from ‘me’ to ‘we,’ the wind picks up, the sails fill, and the boat is off.”

- *The Green Boat: Reviving Ourselves in Our Capsized Culture*  
by Mary Pipher (Riverhead Books, 2013)

## Some Wondering GEMS

- How do we help people develop and use their talents for the common good?
- When we invite them to tell their stories, do we invite them to tell stories of their experiences of “we” rather than “me?”
- “...conversations between people about what is most important in their lives”: how do all of our adult faith formation efforts provide time for sacred conversations among people?
- “With this transformation from ‘me’ to ‘we,’ the wind picks up, the sails fill, and the boat is off.” What if this was retranslated: “With this transformation from ‘me’ to ‘we,’ the SPIRIT picks up, the sails fill, and the boat is off.”
  - What happens – what could happen – when all our efforts enable transformation to “we;” when we let the Spirit pick up and work?



## Golden Nuggets from You

“I was forwarded [GEMS #29](#) and found it very interesting. We are going to be remodeling our church (Immaculate Conception Parish in Elmhurst, IL) this summer so the evening of reflection might work VERY well for us as a way to introduce our ‘NEW’ church to our Liturgical Ministers.

On the last page, I saw this paragraph. “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](mailto:jschaeffler@adriandominicans.org) so that the suggestions can be shared with all of us.’

# GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

It caught my eye because just this morning I was at a Chamber of Commerce breakfast and met a man that DOES virtual tours. [This link](#) will take you to Ascension Catholic Church in Oak Brook Terrace where, by clicking your mouse, you can take a tour of this church...amazing eh? The man's name is Dick Davis; his website is [www.reddphotos.com](http://www.reddphotos.com).

Thanks again for the info on **GEMS**...keep up the good work!

- *Dave McCaffery, Immaculate Conception Parish, Elmhurst, IL*

“Wow!!!! Thanks, Sister. I will share this ([GEMS #32](#)) with my DREs next week during a regional meeting.”

- *Cris Villapando, Director of Faith Formation, Charlotte, NC*

“Sr. Janet,

I just want to take a moment to thank you for the excellent ideas and thought provoking endeavors that you curate and share with us each month. It is truly appreciated. Our diocesan staff plans to bring **GEMS** to the attention of the parish catechetical leaders once again, as we continue to encourage them to work with other parish leadership to invite, engage and empower more of our adult Catholics. Evangelization takes place in many ways - and the **GEMS** that you mine, so to speak, can be a wonderful resource for that.

Blessings on all that you do!

- *Catherine Cornue, Diocesan Director of Faith Formation, Syracuse, NY*



Janet Schaeffler, OP

[www.janetschaeffler.com](http://www.janetschaeffler.com) ~ [jschaeffler@adriandominicans.org](mailto:jschaeffler@adriandominicans.org)

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/ebooks/> Scroll down 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.*