



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

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A Best (Practice) Process!

Researchers and learning-experts remind us that, in order to be more whole-brained, we need to give equal attention to the arts, creativity, and the skills of imagination and synthesis. As we plan and lead others in the journey of faith, do we, at times, favor left brain thinking more than the right brain style of thinking?

Left brain thinking favors the logical, sequential, rational, analysis, accuracy, the objective, and examines the parts.

The **right brain** approach prefers the random, intuitive, holistic, aesthetics, creativity, synthesizing, the subjective and feelings as well as a look at the whole.

As we plan and lead others in the journey of faith, are we aware that different people have different learning styles? Are we aware that the theory of Multiple Intelligences suggests that there are eight different intelligences which account for a broad range of human potential in all learners? These intelligences are:

- Verbal-Linguistic intelligence (*using language to present ideas*)
- Logical-Mathematical intelligence (*reasoning, logical thinking; handling mathematical problems*)
- Visual-Spatial intelligence (*creating and interpreting visual images; thinking in three dimensions*)
- Bodily-Kinesthetic intelligence (*feeling and expressing things physically; hands-on work*)
- Musical-Rhythmic intelligence (*creating and feeling a rhythm to express a mood; detecting and analyzing musical themes*)
- Interpersonal intelligence (*between people; understanding the needs, feelings and purposes of others*)

- Intrapersonal intelligence (*within the self; understanding one's interior feelings and thoughts in a clear way*)
- Naturalist intelligence (*understanding nature; seeing patterns in the way nature works; classifying things*)

As we plan and lead others in the journey of faith, do our adult faith formation opportunities include teaching and learning activities from all of these intelligences?

If you want to change the world,
don't bring in the politicians who make the laws;
bring in the poets who tell the stories.

- Leonard Sweet

An Example: One Practical Practice and Process

Joanne Lambert, the Director of Religious Education at St. Lawrence Parish, Miami, FL, shares with us one activity which led the participants beyond logical words and discussions.

Joanne uses this activity in retreats and with those gathered for the RCIA process (catechumens, candidates, sponsors, and family members). In many ways, what is described here is one simple process; perhaps it can broaden our awareness of all that might be possible. As you read on, think about:

- How and with whom could you use this process?
- What other activities come to mind that you might use in the future?

At St. Lawrence Parish, particularly with the RCIA process, several "reflection" gatherings were scheduled throughout the year which seemed to help the participants assimilate their learning, understanding it as growth on their faith journey. Using activities, such as writing cinquains, helped everyone to focus on an aspect of their spiritual growth and understanding in a deliberate way.

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A cinquain is a five-line poem which can occur in three different styles, each one meeting a specific purpose:

- This first style may be written about anything. However, it's often used to describe a person, place, or thing.
 - Line1: One word
 - Line2: Two words
 - Line 3: Three words
 - Line 4: Four words
 - Line 5: One word
- The second style is strictly about a specific noun, a particular concept (or mystery of our faith) but not (usually) a specific person.
 - Line1: A noun
 - Line2: Two adjectives
 - Line 3: Three -ing words
 - Line 4: A phrase
 - Line 5: Another word for the noun
- This style of cinquain is most easily adapted to various subjects.
 - Line1: Two syllables
 - Line2: Four syllables
 - Line 3: Six syllables
 - Line 4: Eight syllables
 - Line 5: Two syllables

The directions which were given to the RCIA participants and retreatants (for an exploration of their relationship with God and/or the meaning of discipleship) were:

A cinquain is a five-line poem that allows you to express, in a creative way, your understanding of a topic.

The topic of this cinquain is your relationship with God (the meaning of discipleship).

Follow these simple steps and create your own cinquain.

1. *Write a noun (that represents your relationship with God or the meaning of discipleship).*
2. *Write two adjectives or words that describe your first word.*

3. *Write a three word phrase that describes an action relating to your title or just three action words.*
4. *Write a four word phrase that describes a feeling relating to your topic or just four feeling words.*
5. *Write one word that refers to and sums up your original word.*

The following are two examples from the RCIA participants and retreatants, the first on relationship with God; the second on discipleship:

Comfort
Grace-filled
Caring, Growing, Forgiving
Constant source of love
Father

Discipleship
Respectful, Attentive
Always following Jesus
Always love the leader
Apprentice

Some Suggestions for Using this Process

The following are some tips and methods which Joanne used as the participants were invited to enter this creative, prayerful process:

- The directions were fully explained, but a sample cinquain (on the topic) was not shared at the beginning. The participants, then, did not feel there was “a standard” to equal, to live up to. (*Sample cinquains on various other topics might be shared, to give the directions some concrete examples.*)

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- After the writing of the cinquains, everyone was invited to read their creation to the group, if they wished to do that.
- Joanne read her cinquain first, to encourage the others, to “break the ice.” *(A wonderful and important technique: enter into any/all activities with the learners. Never ask them to do anything unless you are going to do it also.)*
- Hospitality is key to any endeavor whose goal is to get people talking from their hearts. Joanne shares that she found that having hard candies and lollipops available gave people a means of retreating if they needed to (you can't talk with candy in your mouth!) and also served as an ice breaker as notes were compared on favorite flavors, etc.

Faith
God, amazing
Believing in God
Feels like a blessing
Trust

What factors, do you think, motivated the people to respond to and participate in this initiative?

Joanne's reflections on the motivation of the people were several:

- It was fun.
- We would share our end products and hearing others' responses seemed to open up even the shyest of the group.
- Writing in specific genres, like the cinquains, made it more than just sharing. It was a creative process that allowed people to really focus on various themes (the communion of saints, God's forgiveness, etc.) and distill their understanding into a concise and descriptive end product.

- Sometimes we did word associations that really got people opening up.

What did the participants express about their experience of writing cinquains to express their faith?

- I was afraid at first. I thought, for sure, I would “fail” at this. That's not how I feel now!
- This was an emotional experience for me: writing my own and being privileged to hear the feelings of others.
- I was surprised at how much I enjoyed this new experience, a new way of reflecting on my faith.
- Using this different and creative way of expressing my relationship with God somehow validated all I've been doing this year.
- This process helped me, in a more concrete way, to feel like I belong to this group.
- In reflecting upon my completed cinquain, I feel more mature about my relationship with God.

(Jesus used) all the resources
of interpersonal communication,
such as word, silence, metaphor, image,
example, and many diverse signs
as was the case with the biblical prophets.

- General Directory for Catechesis, #140

Did you (as facilitator) learn anything from doing this? Were you surprised by anything?

Joanne's thoughts give us much to think about and apply to various realities of adult faith formation:

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- I am always surprised by the bonding that occurs between totally different people from all walks of life and the way they become such a cohesive group by the end of the time together.
- We have two distinct communities, Spanish and English, and I have seen a "coming together" of our two groups as the format has been bilingual. I see people having a little more interest in one another's cultural similarities, as well as differences. I notice that our RCIA folk are "cross-overs;" they seem to feel comfortable at English and Spanish services, especially because we do our activities in our primary languages and then share, taking time to translate for one another.
- I learned and was surprised by (as I think some of the participants were) the many different ways that people encounter God. The topic was personal relationship with God and whether it be in pain or ecstasy, grief or joy, beauty or squalor, each person comes to God in their own experience in their own time. For me, that is one of the many blessings that I receive from the RCIA ministry. Sharing these journeys expands my own encounter with God through the lens of others' experiences that are so different to my own but that send us all in the same direction, towards God.

What do you think the participants gained from this experience?

Joann commented that she can't be sure (we never totally know what is happening for people; at times they don't know it until weeks, months, years later).

- "My hope is that the participants are able to use this activity to clarify what they've learned about the topic in a simple and creative manner that does not require any unique skills or talents. I hope that this clarification brings them greater understanding and the desire to learn more."
- "I think they became more aware of their willingness to be open to an experience of faith-sharing as well as being patient with one another's different experiences and cultures."

Tell me and I forget.
Teach me and I remember.
Involve me and I learn.

- Benjamin Franklin

Some Related Resources/Experiences

There are various ways to use the Multiple Intelligences and right brain thinking within our journey of faith. A few others you might incorporate into adult faith formation:

- The website, [Explore Faith: Meditate with Poetry](#), suggests a process for praying with poetry. Several poems are on the site, but the method will work with any poem.

One of the steps suggests journaling responses to various prompts, including "If I were to paint a picture about this poem I would include [in] my work of art..."

- ✓ Have you ever prayed with poetry or works of art?
- ✓ What has been your experience with these forms of prayer?

- In addition to Lectio Divina, explore and pray with Visio Divina
 - ✓ Praying with Art: <http://www.kellywahlquist.com/blog/2013/12/29/visio-divina-praying-with-art>
 - ✓ Seeing the Word: <http://www.seeingtheword.org/>
 - ✓ Visio Divina: <http://www.stbenedictcenter.com/index.php/2012-01-26-15-13-30?start=2>
- Praying with Movement:
 - ✓ Movement Prayers (although these are described for children and teens, most can be easily adapted for adults: <http://www.1ststeps.net/Resources/PrayerBlessingBasedSpirituality/MovementPrayers/tabid/1053/Default.aspx>)

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- ✓ Prayer in Motion: <http://www.prayer-in-motion.com/>
- ✓ *Praying with the Body: Bringing the Psalms to Life* by Roy DeLeon, OblSB (Paraclete Press)
- ✓ The Labyrinth: <http://www.labyrinth.org.uk/>
- ✓ See [GEMS #52](#): Praying with the Labyrinth

- Learning and Praying through creativity: *Making Crosses: A Creative Connection to God* by Ellen Morris Prewitt (Paraclete Press)
- Praying with art: <http://www.prayerwindows.com/>
- Praying with nature:
 - ✓ Praying Nature: <http://www.praying-nature.com/>
 - ✓ A reflection by James Martin, SJ: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=37KTD9K04Nk>
 - ✓ Pray a Psalm in its Nature Setting: <http://www.soulshpherd.org/2009/08/pray-a-psalm-in-its-nature-setting/>
- Praying with Color:
 - ✓ Finding the Sacred in Coloring: <http://www.loyolapress.com/praying-with-color-finding-the-sacred-in-coloring-mandalas.htm>
 - ✓ *Praying in Color: Drawing a New Path to God* by Sybil MacBeth (Paraclete Press)
- Check the vast array of YouTube videos to explore ways of bringing music and visuals to life within your adult faith formation settings.

A GEMS Reminder

The cinquain process – and the other ideas suggested just above – are not just for use during RCIA sessions and retreats. Think of the myriad ways they can be incorporated into many different kinds of adult faith formation opportunities, for instance: parish pastoral council and commissions retreats, catechist formation gatherings, various support groups (grief, divorced and separated), staff meetings, intergenerational faith formation, women’s retreats, evangelization efforts, etc.



Golden Nuggets from You

“Wow, Sr. Janet! This is really excellent! ([GEMS #33](#)). Beautifully written, clear and so rich in content. Thank you so much. This must have taken a long time to put together. I appreciate all your efforts and will use many of your points.

- *Janene Ternes, Director, Prayer in Motion*



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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:

- *The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation*
http://www.lifelongfaith.com/store/p25/The_Seasons_of_Adult_Faith_Formation.html
- *The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation website*
<http://www.seasonsofadultfaith.com/>
- *40 Tips: Getting Started in Adult Faith Formation*
<http://www.ecatechist.com/ebooks/> (*scroll down*)
- *Parish Leadership for Improved Adult Catechesis*
<http://store.pastoralplanning.com/iboplbeprfor.html>