



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

#67 - July 2015

A Best Practice: An Integrated and Continually-Growing Process

As you think about planning for adult faith formation:

- How might you work and collaborate **with other parishes** in your area (even if you're not part of a cluster)?
- Do your formation experiences **integrate all areas** of our faith life: liturgy, formation, community, and service?
- What are practices that you are doing – or could do – to incorporate the **various cultures** within your area?
- What opportunities might present themselves – in your parish/area - to explore **one main theme**, continually building on it?
- What **current topic/theme** within the church, within our national and international lives, within the needs of your parishioners' daily lives are pertinent and rich soil for ongoing learning and transformation in faith and life?

When we plan for adult faith formation, there are many guiding principles. This issue of **GEMS** will explore how one cluster of parishes focused on these four (and others):

- Effective adult faith formation **integrates** all of Christian life: worship and prayer, community, learning and formation, and service and outreach.
- Successful adult faith formation is guided by an adult faith formation **committee**.
- Sensitive adult faith formation plans for and incorporates the **many cultures** in today's parishes.
- Meaningful adult faith formation processes and offerings continue to **grow and expand**, building on the previous learnings and experiences of the parishioners; no such thing as a one-time event.

Who? Where?

In Northern Mississippi, six parishes have formed a cluster which is served by the Priests of the Sacred Heart and one Sister of Mercy:

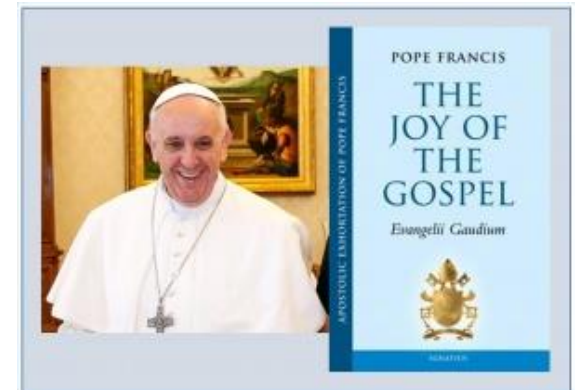
- Christ the King, Southaven, MS
- Queen of Peace, Olive Branch, MS
- St. Gregory, Senatobia, MS
- Good Shepherd, Robinsonville, MS
- Holy Spirit, Hernando, MS
- St. Joseph, Holly Springs, MS.

To generate ideas and take responsibility for guiding faith formation for the adult parishioners of this cluster, an adult faith formation committee was formed.

A Necessary First Step

The first step for the group was (and continues to be) 'formation of self.'

In August 2014 the group decided to use Pope Francis' *The Joy of the Gospel* for reflection and study throughout the year.



The Planning Commences

In late October, the committee began plans to invite the adults of the six parishes to venture into a study of this apostolic exhortation by Pope Francis. What resulted was a combination of many forms of education, formation and participation, all centering around *The Joy of the Gospel*.

- Between Thanksgiving and Christmas 2014, copies of *The Joy of the Gospel* were made available for parishioners. Over 550 people purchased and read Pope Francis' vision of the church.

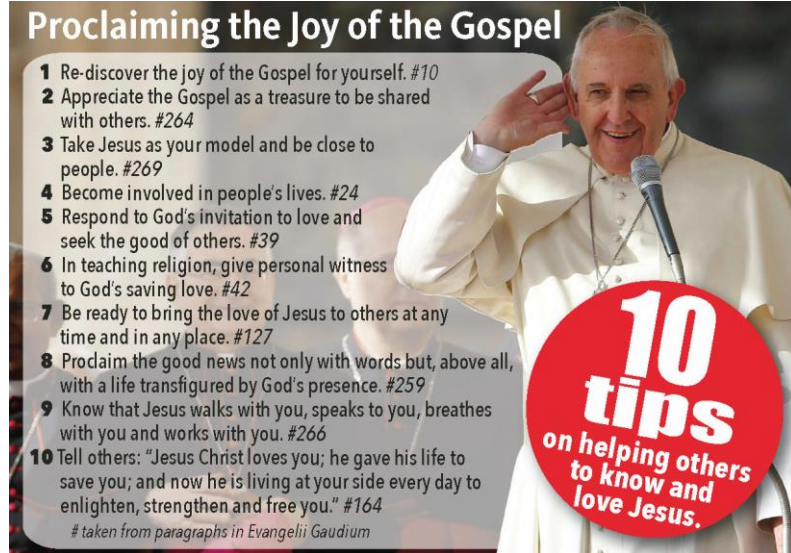
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- At the same time, publicity was begun for a coming parish mission which focused on the messages of the document.

The Key Event

The parish mission took place three evenings in English and in Spanish in January 2015. Two hundred people participated in this opportunity.

In order to accommodate both English and Spanish in the same evening, the schedule was arranged that while the talk was given in English, supper was served to the Spanish-speaking group who then attended the talk in Spanish. The English-speaking participants were served supper during the Spanish talk. Child care was provided.



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(Michael McGrath Director)

The Learning Continued

The follow-up to the mission was to form “conversation groups” throughout Lent and beyond. Sr. Emily Morgan, RSM comments: “The use of the title “conversation groups” led to many more groups being formed (35 in all) as opposed to calling them “study groups.”

The guidelines for each group were simple (and open to the needs of each particular group):

- Use Pope Francis’ *The Joy of the Gospel* for your study and reflection in the way that is most helpful for your group.
- There is no time-table for finishing the book.
- The key is the conversation. Take a sentence, a paragraph, a chapter.....; whatever feels right for your group.

The Diversity of the Groups

Convinced that “one size does not fill all,” the plans – and actualities – saw a diversity of groups. Some groups:

- finished their exploration by the end of Lent
- continued throughout the summer months
- finished the book and then asked for more material to keep their group going
- met in homes; some gathered in the parish hall
- consisted of all men; some were all women
- (most) were advertized so that anyone could join; a few were formed by already existing groups specifically for those groups

Some parishioners read the book on their own and did not join a group. Sr. Emily remarked: “We could not keep up with all the groups and all the ways *The Joy of the Gospel* was being read and discussed.!”

The Learning was Integrated

In addition to the parish mission and the conversation groups, *The Joy of the Gospel* was integrated into the life of the parish: focused introductions to the messages of *The Joy of the Gospel* at the penitential rites at Mass, the general intercessions, the homilies, the Sunday bulletins, etc.

The Learning was Diversified

Many of the conversation groups desired to continue after their study of *The Joy of the Gospel*. Many groups found their own materials; in other cases, Sr. Emily made suggestions, knowing the group and their interest. Some of the many resources being used:

- Scripture study flowing from the Sunday Scriptures
- College level courses (Catholic Adult Leadership Learning)
- Catechist certification courses

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- A men's prayer breakfast using Vatican II documents on Church
- *Why Catholic?* from Renew International
- The video series *Catholicism*
- Various short term opportunities such as *Living Eucharist* and *Disciples in Mission* from Paulist Press
- Scripture study from Little Rock Scripture Study (such as the Infancy Narratives during Advent)

The Culmination of the year on *The Joy of the Gospel*

Wrapping up the work of the year came with a large celebration of Pentecost using the theme of *Gifted, Called and Sent by the Joy of the Gospel*. Pentecost afternoon found 300 people at Holy Spirit Parish (one of the 6 parishes in the cluster) for a prayer service of processions with banners, Scripture, singing and prayer celebrating the many cultures within the cluster (Anglo, Irish, Italian, Hispanic {from all countries in Central and South America}, Filipino, Guam, Vietnamese, Chinese, African American}).

During the prayer, an activity brought the year's theme and project to a close. At the front of church were easels – one with the name of each parish.



The participants were given pens and post-it notes to answer the question: "Having been nourished by the Joy of the Gospel, what are you now called to do?" While music played, each person brought forward their answer, placing it on their parish board. Quiet time was then given for people to peruse and read the responses of others.

This question and time for reflection helped people to focus on translating the "learning" into action. For many people, it intensified and made more explicit what they were already doing, since many parishioners of the six parishes were already living their call to service and outreach through:

- active involvement with [Sacred Heart Southern Missions in Walls, MS](#) which runs seven social service centers with many programs: food pantries, clothing stores, housing programs, AIDS programs, educational programs.
- collecting baby items for the Pregnancy Care Center
- working with interfaith groups
- contributing to baskets of food, toys, and clothes at Christmas
- participating in week-long and sometimes weekend opportunities for work on housing rehab projects in their poorer neighborhoods
- joining the cleanup project for the recent tornado damage in Holly Springs

Sr. Emily remarked, "I think the main point of all the 'works of mercy evangelization' would be that people are more INTENTIONAL about their actions in terms of helping the poor and even in care of the earth. A young adult said to me last week: "Remember *what Laudato Si'* says!"

Following the prayer service, another procession formed (with banners from the many counties/culture mentioned above and from each parish) and was led to the parish hall by three Vietnamese dragons. A potluck dinner was enjoyed,

with entertainment by the cluster's Mexican Folkloric dance group and the Vietnamese youth group dancers. The evening ended with the breaking of three piñatas.



The Venture Continues into another Year

Given the enthusiasm and response to *The Joy of the Gospel*, the adult faith formation committee met in August 2015 to plan for the coming year. They found that Pope Francis again provided rich material:

- The Year of Mercy
- *Laudato Si'*
- The Synod on the Family

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Questions were formulated by the committee to guide this new year:

- How does Mercy form and inform the family and how does Mercy form and inform ‘our common home’?
- How will we promote this throughout 2015-2016?

Beginning again with the Necessary First Step

Formation for the committee went directly to the core documents:

- Pope Francis’ *Bull of Indication of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy* (http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/document/s/papa-francesco_bolla_20150411_misericordiae-vultus.html)
- The documents proposed for the Synod on the Family (<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/2014-2015-synods-of-bishops-on-the-family.cfm>)
- *Laudato Si’ – On Care for our Common Home*

Sr. Emily remarked, “What a task!”

The next meeting found the committee struggling to simplify their approach to the wealth of the rich material and to such important and deep concepts.

Decisions were made to:

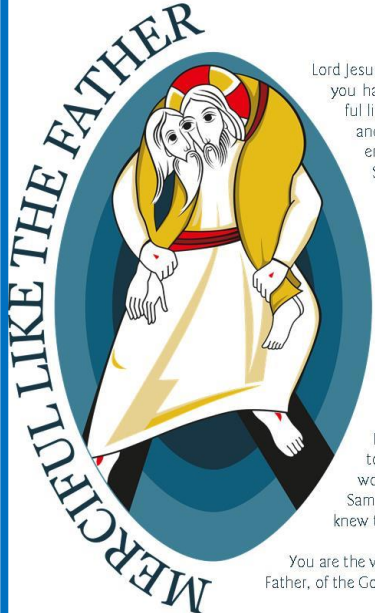
- focus the formation opportunities during: Advent; a parish mission in January; Lent-Easter and Pentecost
- form two committees: 1) Publicity for the year; 2) Planning and hosting the various events

Advent

Advent was filled with a focus on mercy during the celebration of liturgy and the sacraments as well as opportunities for individual reflection and conversation groups.

- Liturgy:
 - Penitential Rites were written to focus on mercy. “Mercy is...” (using words from Pope Francis)
 - Responsorial Psalm 33 was sung throughout Advent

- Song at Presentation of Gifts: Hymn of the Jubilee of Mercy <http://www.iubilaeummisericordiae.va/content/gdm/en/giubileo/inno.html>
- Response to the General Intercessions: Be merciful like the Father
- Banners were placed in all six parishes all 6 parishes: deep purple with the words “Jesus,” “Incarnate,” and “Mercy”
- Handouts
 - Handout for week one: The Advent prophets Baruch and Jeremiah, stressing God’s mercy
 - Handout for week two: Flyer with the logo the logo of the Year of Mercy and its explanation and the prayer of Pope Francis. (Each parish also had a large poster with the logo in color featured at the entrance of the church in the gathering spaces.) The prayer stayed in the pews to be prayed as a community once a month.



PRAYER FOR THE YEAR OF MERCY

Lord Jesus Christ, you have taught us to be merciful like the heavenly Father, and have told us that whoever sees you sees Him. Show us your face and we will be saved. Your loving gaze freed Zacchaeus and Matthew from being enslaved by money; the adulteress and Magdalene from seeking happiness only in created things; made Peter weep after his betrayal, and assured Paradise to the repentant thief. Let us hear, as if addressed to each one of us, the words that you spoke to the Samaritan woman: “If you knew the gift of God!”

his power above all by forgiveness and mercy: let the Church be your visible face in the world, its Lord risen and glorified. You willed that your ministers would also be clothed in weakness in order that they may feel compassion for those in ignorance and error: let everyone who approaches them feel sought after, loved, and forgiven by God. Send your Spirit and consecrate every one of us with its anointing, so that the Jubilee of Mercy may be a year of grace from the Lord, and your Church, with renewed enthusiasm, may bring good news to the poor, proclaim liberty to captives and the oppressed, and restore sight to the blind. We ask this of you, Lord Jesus, through the intercession of Mary, Mother of Mercy; you who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen.

You are the visible face of the invisible Father, of the God who manifests

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During this second week booklets for the conversation groups were available: What Pope Francis Says About Mercy (<http://store.pastoralplanning.com/whpofrsaabme.html>)

- Handout for week three: A Year of Mercy (a pamphlet explaining what the Year of Mercy means to the Church and to each of us and includes practical ideas and tips for things that can be done to celebrate the Jubilee, becoming beacons of mercy to the world (<https://www.catholiccompany.com/year-mercy-pamphlet-50-pack-i114892/>). This was provided in English and Spanish – as is everything that is done within this cluster.
- Handout for week four: Elizabeth, Mary and John Baptist
- Sunday bulletins:
 - Short articles exploring the Year of Mercy
 - Activities of the parish
 - Family Reconciliation Services focusing on mercy within the family
 - Various websites with resources and available apps
- Publicity: large display boards inviting everyone to the parish mission in January focused on the living of mercy

Lent-Easter

The focus for Lent continued to be on Mercy, but also on Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, using a weekly flyer, *Lent 4.2 Caring for our Common Home* (<http://www.lent42.org/Our-Common-Home/>)

The RCIA dramatically carry Catholics through Lent. Connected with the Scrutinies and the conversion focus of Lent, the parishes continued “Mercy is...” during the Penitential Rite (as they did in Advent).

The Mercy Walk (prayer areas set up with pictures/symbols of the Works of Mercy according to the ideas in *Laudato Si'*) invited people to from space to space, sitting for a while in silence, meditating on how their lives reflected the particular work of mercy.

Various Lenten talks were provided for the cluster of parishes:

- Mercy Through Our Gifts
- Hidden Mercy
- The Younger Son Leaves Home
- The Older Son Leaves Home
- Merciful Like the Father
- Nourished and Forgiven

Throughout the process, it had been difficult to involve young adults. Perhaps because of the ongoing participation and enthusiasm of many adults within the six parishes, six young adults (college age) came together with Sr. Emily to plan a retreat evening shortly after Easter. (The young adults did the vast majority of brainstorming and planning, sometimes telling Sr. Emily that she could be quiet.)

The planning team set up an enclosed environment to represent the “upper room” after Easter. The evening began with supper – in the room hiding with the disciples. Using several of the Easter Scripture readings – and their relationship to mercy – the evening had time for conversation, reflection and decision.

A portion of the evening was dedicated to quiet time for people whose lives can be very busy and noisy. During this time, several options were available, meeting the various needs of the participants: a quiet prayer place, celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, a conversation room (with a set of questions to discuss about how to be Mercy in this Year of Mercy), an arts room (with various art projects to assist in recognizing mercy in Jesus; {Talking was permitted in this room but only in whispers!}).

The Pentecost Celebration of the Year of Mercy

As last year, Pentecost 2016 saw a large parish celebration to bring together the fruits of the year. An afternoon prayer service and dinner celebrated their renewed appreciation and commitment to mercy as well as their identity of many cultures within the cluster. (A Vietnamese doctor reminded the planning team that they needed some American square dancers.)

The prayer service again featured individual reflections: each person was invited to remember a story or two about how mercy has touched them in

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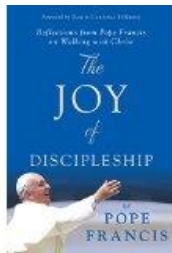
their everyday lives. These were succinctly captured on post-it notes and shared with each other on display boards.

Centered on the theme, “Mercifully, Jesus Sent Us His Spirit,” the welcome and the printed program did not list any names; there were no recognitions and thank yous. They were hoping to invite everyone to simply experience “church” as “us.”



And the Journey Continues...

The Year of Mercy will conclude with another parish mission – reflecting once again on the gift and challenge of mercy - in November 2016, before the beginning of Advent.



Plans for the following year (2017) have already begun: focusing on *The Joy of Love*. Catechetical staffs and adult faith formation committees will spend three days studying the document and planning how to use with catechists, parents and all parishioners beginning in Advent 2016.

A GEMS Suggestion

To read about another endeavor in which many parishes (not a cluster, but in the same geographic region) worked together in a joint venture, see [GEMS #12](#).

Some GEMS Wonderings

- What ideas have sparked in you as you read about this many-faceted opportunity?
- How might it be possible to revolve numerous activities around one theme – a theme which the church – or the needs of the day – are calling us to?
- If you formed a planning committee (as this cluster did), who would you invite from your parish?
- Could an endeavor such as this include parish-initiated and sponsored outreach and service?
- Has your parish (cluster/group of parishes) explored *The Joy of the Gospel*; the meaning (and challenge) of mercy; and *Laudato Si'*?
- Are you ready to explore Pope Francis' new book, *The Joy of Discipleship*?



Adding New Luster to an Old Gem

In [GEMS #11](#), we explored Scripture study through an online opportunity.

Some continuing thoughts on using Facebook for adult faith formation:

- There are three types of Facebook Groups:
 - Public (Open): everyone can see the Group, find it in a search and make posts

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- Closed: everyone can see the Group, but only members can see (and make) posts
- Secret: only members can see the Group, see and make posts. To learn more about this type of group, read the [How to Use Secret Facebook Groups](#). As you read this post, allow your imagination to consider how a Facebook group could be used in your adult faith formation setting.
- Some tips:
 - Create a Facebook group, describing the group and choose an image/photo that will represent the group.
 - Two weeks before the opportunity, send an email inviting the adults who have previously responded and/or indicated on your parish survey that they are interested in adult formation opportunities.
 - One day after the email is sent, send a "tweet" and "text message" to invite your parishioners to read the email message from you.
- Post the scripture readings or a link to the content (articles, videos, etc.) that you are going to use.
- Once the conversation begins, check the posts at least once daily and comment back. This is a place for a simple online conversation and sharing.



Golden Nuggets from You

“This edition ([GEMS #38](#)) is phenomenal! Rich with tons of new ideas!!! Thanks and God bless you for the gazillion hours you spent on this.”

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

“Love this latest issue of GEMS ([GEMS #40](#)). I just passed it along to our Adult Faith Formation team. We have a newly formed Technology committee in the parish. At times it seems as though they are focused predominantly on the school so this will broaden their perspective a lot!”

- *Mary Caroline Marchal, SC;
Former DRE at Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, Louisville, KY;
Presently a member of the Leadership Council of the Sisters of Charity,
Cincinnati*

“[GEMS #43](#) arrived; I am so grateful to you for doing this. I was looking for some material to use in our first in-service for Parish Catechists/Facilitators of Adult Faith Formation. ‘Insights that Spark Reflection’ will definitely be part of the event.”

- *Suzanne Nelson; Director of Adult Faith Formation,
St. Raphael Parish, Rockville, MD*



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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.lifelongfaith.com/2015-adult-faith-formation-symposium.html>
- *40 Tips: Getting Started in Adult Faith Formation*
<http://www.ecatechist.com/ebooks/> (*scroll down*)