



# GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

*from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study*

# 13 - November 2011

## **A Best Practice: *Don't Be Caught Dead, Plan Ahead ...* (and some other best practices)**

A very common adult faith formation technique is a series of talks or workshops. Why is this one being featured? Let's read on and it will, hopefully, become obvious.

In addition to an extensive description of *Don't Be Caught Dead, Plan Ahead*, you will also find here:

- two other opportunities offered by additional parishes
- some suggested resources

### **Just what is it?**

A few years ago, Jann Newman, Christian Service Director at St. Isaac Jogues Parish, St. Clair Shores, Michigan planned a three-week workshop series designed to help people work on plans for their funeral, with each session focusing on a specific aspect of the preparation.

The series, entitled *Don't Be Caught Dead, Plan Ahead*, **attracted people's attention** and got them thinking and talking, **even before the first session** began.

### **Why was this planned and offered?**

- Jann began to realize that often after funerals, parishioners would come up to her and say, "I really liked that hymn. I want it at my funeral." "I would like that Scripture reading at my funeral."

Many times these folks were saying it as though they wanted Jann to remember their particular request when it came time for *their* funeral. Therefore, it seemed time to help them look at **their own funeral planning** and provide an opportunity *for them* to write down their plans.

- It was becoming more and more obvious as families came to arrange for a funeral and make plans for the liturgy that they were stymied in **knowing where to begin** and often in understanding the various parts of the Mass.

- As the years are passing, people's lives are becoming busier, families are living further apart, and customs are changing; for some people, **attitudes toward death and funerals are shifting**.

The theology of death and resurrection, and **the rituals of the funeral rites** within the Catholic Church, are **rich with meaning**, filled with hope and consolation. Yet, many people have never experienced them, or had a chance – catechetically – to reflect on their meaning.

### **Why is this a "good" adult faith formation offering?**

- One of the most important principles of adult learning is that adults learn best when:
  - the learning is **meeting a life need**
  - the offering is coming directly from their **life experiences**
  - it is something that will **answer their questions**

At times, do we offer programs that answer questions which people aren't asking? Things might be on our agenda, but they don't have anything to do with the questions, worries, concerns that are currently on people's minds.

"An approach of 'corned beef and hash for everyone' (which is tantamount to 'We don't care what you need, this is what you get because this is what we've got') and programs based simply on what the religious educator or pastor wants to teach are too capricious."

- McKenzie and Harton in  
*The Religious Education of Adults*, 2002

As Michael Leach said on his blog (which he hosted for six months), *Why Stay Catholic*, April 11, 2011: “The average Catholic does not deny the doctrine of papal infallibility. Neither does she spend time affirming it. She’s mostly interested in spiritual ideas that can help her get through the night without worry and get up with joy to face the day.

She is drawn to anyone whose life affirms Jesus’ promise: “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)

- Secondly, this series of workshops can be **an opportunity for evangelization at its best**. Death in a family brings together:
  - people at all stages of faith
  - people with various types of questions about life, faith and the church
  - people with emotions and feelings on every level

This adult faith formation series can be one of the first steps to help parishioners understand and experience the pastoral care of the parish, the compassion of the church at the time of grief and loss, at the time of the funeral rites of the church.

These funeral services are a right,  
not a privilege,  
of all members of the Church,  
both the faithful and the catechumens.  
(canons #1176; 1183.1)

Ministry to the family should not be confined  
to the funeral rites  
or end with the liturgical ministry....

- Website of the diocese of Richmond, VA  
<http://www.richmonddiocese.org/worship/liturgies/funeral.html>

It can be a time of dispelling the myths which some people might have of how the church won’t reach out and care for people at this significant time.

This learning opportunity can be a reassuring time, a supportive time, healing time.

## What was the content/format of the three sessions?

**Session One** explored some of these topics:

- What the Church teaches about funerals
- A look at the Vigil Service, the Funeral Liturgy and the Rite of Committal
- Church teaching regarding cremation
- An overview of the Mass

**Session Two** took a closer look at the planning of the funeral liturgy by exploring:

- The Liturgy of the Word
- Music for the funeral liturgy

The Director of Music for the parish spent a great deal of time during this second session:

- exploring the role of music in liturgy
- explaining the **meaning of liturgical music** and why this music – and not others – is appropriate during our communal celebration of sacraments and liturgy
- playing some of the more-commonly used liturgical music for Vigil Services and funerals
- illustrating how to **match music with the Scripture** readings

As the Liturgy of the Word was explored, the structure of that part of the liturgy was thoroughly explained so that parishioners were **familiar with each reading** as well as where they came from in the Scriptures. They were given a listing of some of the more-frequently chosen readings, but also assured that their choices weren’t limited to those.

To illustrate, some staff members shared the readings they were choosing for their funerals and the personal reasons why these readings had meanings in their lives.

It was suggested that – as the participants take the next several months/years to think about and write out their plans for their funerals – they read and reflect on each reading to determine which ones touch them,

which ones are a Scriptural message they want to leave at the end of their lives.

The parishioners were given all the paperwork that is filled out at the time of a funeral, so that they could reflect on it in prayer, talk about it with their families, make their own plans and write it out. They knew the options, all the ways their family and friends could prayerfully and actively participate in the liturgy, and, therefore, could make plans for it.

**Session Three** consisted of two segments. During the first section, hospital personnel presented information and answered questions concerning

- **advance health care directives**
- **DNR (Do Not Resuscitate) orders**

The second segment was a round table discussion with funeral directors. They were invited to talk with the parishioners about helpful things for people to know at the time of the death of a loved one.

Some of the topics covered/some of the questions asked were:

- What to do when someone dies at home
- The costs involved
  
- What kind of paperwork do I need? What do I need to do?
- Are rented caskets possible?
  
- What about military funerals and military cemeteries?
- How do I pre-plan a funeral?
- When, how, how many death certificates do I receive?

### Two Sparkling Suggestions:

- In inviting the funeral directors, remind them that their role in this workshop is not to advertize their funeral home, only to be a **resource to the people** with their knowledge and experience.
  
- On your part, be sure not to show partiality, inviting only some funeral directors. **Invite all** the reputable funeral directors in your area to be a part of this round table.

### Has There Been a Difference?

In asking Jann that question: “Have you seen a difference since this series of workshop was done?” her immediate response was, “For many of the parishioners who have taken the reflective time to plan their funeral and write it out, there has been a **peaceful sense of completion.**”

Secondly, many people had an increased and **deepened understanding** of the liturgy in general, the funeral liturgy in particular; and the church’s ministry at the time of the funeral and grief.

Third - a very important indication of its impact – this series first took place a couple years ago. People are now asking that it be **offered again.**

### Another Facet of this GEM

Now that many people have deepened their understanding and developed their skills to plan their funerals, might they need more?

At times might they need the language, help and suggestions to talk with their families, friends, and others about the need, the reasons, the beauty, and the comfort and consolation of the Christian funeral liturgy?

Another session, with actual family situations presented and discussed, might be an addition to the program which some people might appreciate, for which some might have a real need.

Funerals present an enormous opportunity for evangelization and Christian service and witness. People can experience the human face of the Church through its care, concern and effective liturgies.

For some it may be their only experience in many years of the Catholic Church and for them an opportunity to explore questions about their faith.

- Website of the diocese of Sandhurst, Victoria, Australia  
<http://www.sandhurst.catholic.org.au/policies-and-key-documents/pastoral-notes-on-funerals.html>

## A Wondering GEM

Reflecting upon the importance of each of the topics presented in this three week program, as well as other questions and subjects flowing from them, might another series, or one-time sessions be offered as follow-ups for those who are interested?

- Perhaps the session on **advance directives, DNRs** and related issues would be a gathering in itself
- Some people might find a conversation on **suicide** very helpful
- The topic of **donating bodies to science** may raise questions that some people would appreciate exploring
- Today the practice of **natural/green burial** is becoming more common in many areas. To explain the reasons, the local customs and answer questions would provide a service. See the many resources available, especially:
  - <http://www.greenburialcouncil.org/>
  - <http://tiny.cc/obv3m>

## It's Happening in Many Places

This type of opportunity is being offered – in various ways, from different perspectives – in many parishes. Jeanne Martin, the Director of Religious Education at St. William Parish, Walled Lake, Michigan tells about their two-evening event on *The Catholic Perspective on Death, Dying, and Funerals*.

A hospital chaplain was invited for the first evening to present the Catholic theology of death and dying. He did this from an anthropological view which included other religions, illustrating how, over time, things developed to today's understanding.

He also explored the human realities of grief, pain, longings, etc.

During the second evening a local funeral director presented the Catholic ministry of death and dying: especially how laity minister to those who are dying, Catholic burial customs, bereavement, etc.

The committee who planned and implemented this series also put together a take home packet that covered:

- church teachings
- children and grief
- hospice
- and many other materials that pertained to the topic

## The Ministry of Compassion and Hope

Many parishes have called forth and trained ministers to respond at the time of loss and grief, to participate in the Church's ritual moments of outreach.

St. Hugo of the Hills Parish, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan offers an extensive process of formation for these ministers, designed by pastoral associate, Sr. Barbara Rund, OP.

### Part 1 explores *Presiding at the "Vigil for the Deceased."*

The Church calls laypersons to participate in the ministry of consolation to those who have suffered the loss of one whom they love. Christian consolation is rooted in that hope that comes from faith in the saving death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The three principal ritual moments in the *Order of Christian Funerals* are:

- the *Vigil for the Deceased* and Related Rites and Prayers
- the *Funeral Liturgy*
- the *Rite of Committal*

Those willing to be part of this ministry learn – during this first part – how to celebrate and lead the *Vigil for the Deceased* the night before the funeral, and the *Rite of Committal*, which takes place at the cemetery or columbarium as soon as possible following the *Funeral Liturgy*.

The three in-depth sessions focus on:

- #1: Theology of the *Order of Christian Funerals*  
To understand and develop a capacity to minister to those in grief with the “confident belief that death is not the end nor does it break the bonds forged in life”)
- #2: Understanding the *Vigil for the Deceased* and the *Rite of Committal*  
To grow in knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to pray for the dead, and to “bring hope and consolation to the living,” especially at the *Vigil for the Deceased*
- #3: Presiding at the *Vigil for the Deceased*  
Competence to preside at the *Vigil for the Deceased*, with attentiveness to those in grief and sensitivity to the Liturgical Year

## **Part 2 of the formation process continues by exploring *Preaching at the “Vigil for the Deceased”***

In the *Order of Christian Funerals*, paragraph 27 states, “Laypersons who preside at the funeral rites give an instruction on the readings.” These three sessions prepare funeral ministers to preside and give an instruction on the readings at the *Vigil for the Deceased*. Funeral ministers will be able to balance the needs of those mourning and the circumstances of the death.

The three sessions encompass the following:

- #4: Functions of Preaching at the *Vigil for the Deceased*  
An understanding of the function of preaching or giving “an instruction on the readings” in the *Vigil for the Deceased*

- #5: Preparation Process for Preaching at the *Vigil for the Deceased*  
Knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to preach or give “an instruction on the readings” at the *Vigil for the Deceased*
- #6: Preaching at the *Vigil for the Deceased*  
Competence to preach or give “an instruction on the readings” using a Scripture reading from the *Order of Christian Funerals*, with attentiveness to those in grief and sensitivity to the Liturgical Year

This comprehensive, creative and pastoral process will be published later this year. When it is available for parishes, a future issue of **GEMS** will provide the ordering details.

## **Some Resources**

- *Through Death to Life: Preparing to Celebrate the Funeral Mass* by Rev. Joseph Champlin. A planning resource for funeral liturgies, including pastoral compassion and spiritual support for bereaving families, relatives and friends. Ave Maria Press ([www.avemariapress.com](http://www.avemariapress.com)).
- *Now and at the Hour of Our Death: Important Information Concerning My Medical Treatment, Finances, Death and Funeral* by Peter Gilmour and David A. Lysik. Information about living wills, durable powers of attorney, funerals, burial, and cremation. Liturgy Training Publications ([www.ltp.org](http://www.ltp.org)).
- “Last Respects: Emerging Trends in Catholic Funerals” (*Catholic Update*, by Marion Amberg, SAMP, November 2004) <http://www.americancatholic.org/Messenger/Nov2004/Feature2.asp>
- A Guide to Catholic Funerals (Archdiocese of Atlanta, GA) <http://www.archatl.com/offices/odw/ceremony/funeral/funerals.html>
- The Order of Christian Funerals (Archdiocese of Toronto, ON) [http://www.archtoronto.org/about\\_our\\_faith/sacred\\_rites.html](http://www.archtoronto.org/about_our_faith/sacred_rites.html)

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- Guidelines for Catholic Funeral Rites (Diocese of San Diego, CA) [http://www.diocese-sdiego.org/Handbook/Handbook\\_PDFs/Liturgy8.pdf](http://www.diocese-sdiego.org/Handbook/Handbook_PDFs/Liturgy8.pdf)
- Guidelines for the Order of Christian Funerals (Diocese of Calgary, AB) <http://www.calgarydiocese.ca/liturgy/documents/482-guidelines-for-the-order-of-christian-funerals.html>
- Guidelines for Roman Catholic Funerals from the Liturgy Office of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales <http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/OCF/OCFGuidelinesbklt.pdf>
- Catholic Australia: The Funeral Service, The Funeral Booklet <http://www.catholicaustralia.com.au/page.php?pg=sacraments-death2>
- Guidelines for Funeral Liturgies and Wakes (Catholic Ireland) <http://www.catholicireland.net/pages/index.php?nd=121>
- Pastoral Notes on Funerals from the Diocese of Sandhurst, Victoria, Australia <http://www.sandhurst.catholic.org.au/policies-and-key-documents/pastoral-notes-on-funerals.html>
- Catholic Funeral Rites and Customs (Archdiocese of Los Angeles, CA) <http://www.archdiocese.la/prayer/cemeteries/info/rites.html>
- Catholic Funeral Rites (Diocese of St. Petersburg, FL) [http://home.catholicweb.com/DOSP\\_OFW/files/Funeral\\_Resources/The\\_Catholic\\_Funeral\\_Rites\\_handout.PDF](http://home.catholicweb.com/DOSP_OFW/files/Funeral_Resources/The_Catholic_Funeral_Rites_handout.PDF)
- Rites of the Order of Christian Funerals (Diocese of Richmond, VA) <http://www.richmonddiocese.org/worship/liturgies/funeral.htm>

## Additional Resources

Depending upon your region and country, it would be helpful to investigate and know your region's, state's and country's regulations concerning burial.



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Past issues of **GEMS** are archived at [www.janetschaeffler.com](http://www.janetschaeffler.com).

Additional ideas for Adult Faith Formation Best Practices can be found at [www.pastoralplanning.com](http://www.pastoralplanning.com). Go to Adult Formation: *Nuts & Bolts: Planning and Best Practices for Adult Formation*.