



# GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

*from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study*

#4 - December 2010

## A Royal Welcome: Some Secrets of Belonging (Part 2)

Many parishes (and arch/dioceses) today are intentional in the way they seek to be welcoming and offer the radical hospitality of God to both parishioners and newcomers. To know and feel acceptance and welcoming, people need to experience these four human realities:

**TO BE SEEN:** people need to have their existence acknowledged and their presence affirmed

**A Sparkling Suggestion:** When people first register in a parish, this is a crucial time of welcoming, of being acknowledged. St. Francis of Assisi Parish, Ann Arbor, Michigan has organized their parish into fifty-one “neighborhoods.” As soon as new members register in the parish (with over 200 new households registering each year), the coordinator of their neighborhood area is called so that this coordinator **can visit the newly-registered parishioners** and personally welcome them to the parish.

**TO BE HEARD:** people need to have their story listened to and be heard

**A Sparkling Suggestion:** In response to the best practice survey question, “How do you respond/reach out to those who can’t or won’t come for adult faith formation?” Fr. Neil Draves-Arpaia, of St. Clement Parish, Sarasota Springs, New York related that often times they invite parents – who might be resistant – to come in for a one-on-one conversation so they have a **better appreciation for what’s occurring in their lives**. “These conversations can open doors...”

**TO CONTRIBUTE:** people need to have their talents received as their unique offering to the group

**A Sparkling Suggestion:** A recent idea in *Today’s Parish* (September 2010) recommends: “A way to get involved within 24 hours: Think of the many ways you can invite participation from people who are checking out your parish website. ... Be creative about ways you can **get visitors involved within 24 hours.**”

**TO DREAM:** people need hope, the ability to realistically look forward to a better tomorrow

**A Sparkling Suggestion:** Rick Beben, Director of Spirituality at St. Aloysius Parish in Baton Rouge, Louisiana tells of the difference the “Rebuilding Program” makes in the lives of those divorced, whether recently or decades ago. Often people see “adult faith formation” and parish life as responding to only “churchy” issues; yet people live with **practical, everyday life issues**. Where/how do they find hope? Does the Church care about me? Does my faith have something to say about this?

You can never exaggerate  
the importance of hospitality.

- Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan

As we continue our exploration of **a welcoming parish** – and all that that means for adult faith formation – this issue will first focus on some practicalities and suggestions for the liturgical life of the parish.

What does that have to do with adult faith formation ~ might be the question on some people’s minds.

In addition to the realities that:

- we can’t compartmentalize parish life
- the welcoming spirit of the entire parish effects everything

*Our Hearts Were Burning within Us* reminds us: “The parish is the curriculum. While this pastoral plan is concerned primarily with intentional adult faith formation programs, the success of such efforts rests very much on the quality and total fabric of parish life. This includes, for example, the quality of the liturgies....” (#118)

**Everything we do teaches!** The “quality of the liturgies,” everything we experience in liturgy, including the welcoming atmosphere teaches. In fact, the welcoming atmosphere might take precedence. The following was found in a Sunday bulletin from Twin Cities Christian Church, Oceanside, California:

“We have heard of a man who, in an attempt to find out what other churches were really like, visited eighteen different churches on consecutive Sundays.

He always sat near the front. After worship he would walk slowly to the rear, then return to the front, and back to the rear again using another aisle. He was neatly dressed and smiled pleasantly at the other worshippers. He would make it a point to initiate a conversation with at least one other person and would remain for coffee, if served.

He used the following to rate his reception:

10: for a smile from a worshipper  
10: for a greeting from someone sitting nearby  
100: for an exchange of names  
200: for an invitation to return  
1000: for an introduction to another worshipper  
2000: for an introduction to meet the pastor

On this scale, 11 of the 18 churches earned fewer than 100 points and 5 of these actually received less than 20. His conclusion: “The doctrine may be Scriptural, the singing inspirational, the homily uplifting; but when visitors find nobody cares if they’re there, they are unlikely to return.”

**A Survey GEM:** Theresa Alberts from St. Anne Parish, Lena, Wisconsin expressed a similar view on her best practices survey regarding adult faith formation: “Hospitality is very important. I feel it can make it or break it. How would you feel if you were given the cold shoulder and then the presentation went well? Then upon leaving the cold shoulder again. Probably would make someone feel unimportant.”

## Some Diamonds to Shine

In “Evangelizing Visitors,” in the November/December 2006 issue of *Rite*, Lee Nagel says, “...hospitality and evangelization are twins, brother and sister, under the roof of the house of God, a household of abundance, a home full of grace where one finds God’s love and mercy offered with reckless abandon. Nothing is unforgivable; no one is excluded.”

Thomas Richstatter, OFM, in a May 3, 2004 article in *America*, recounts that a study group from a meeting of the North American Academy of Liturgy visited a parish in Harlem for Sunday Eucharist. “After Mass a group of parishioners met with us to discuss our experience. One of our group asked the parishioners, ‘When do you have your deepest experiences of prayer? Where in the liturgy do you experience God?’ Without hesitation, several of the parishioners replied: ‘In the welcoming community.’ Hospitality is a doorway to transcendence.”

What are some best practices to let shine in your welcoming parish as you celebrate liturgically? In addition to these ideas – from all over the world – check the article “Good Hospitality is Good Stewardship: A Checklist for the Advent and Christmas Seasons” by Scott Bader in *Today’s Parish*, November/December 2010.

## All Liturgical Ministers

- Before liturgy begins – whether they’re scheduled or not – all liturgical ministers look for and meet one person each week.
- Liturgical ministers remain a moment after liturgy to thank someone else for his or her ministry that day – an acolyte, a Eucharistic minister, the lector, a choir member, a cantor.
- During coffee and donuts, liturgical ministers – and several other parishioners each week – participate in the “Two Stranger Rule.” They agree not to visit with their friends/family until they have talked with two new people.

## Ministers of Hospitality/Ushers

- Those who have studied the development of liturgical space remind us that the model for a worship area is not a theater or a public hall but a *home*: a place characterized by warmth, friendship, hospitality.

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These ministries of ushering and ministry of hospitality are crucial in creating this place.

- Place greeters **at the side doors**, not just at the main entrance.
- **Greeters in - and throughout - the parking lot** can be a very welcoming and helpful (and surprising) addition. These parking lot welcomers – better than the best valet attendants – can open car doors, greeting parishioners and visitors. On dark winter Saturday evenings, flashlights might be a caring help to accompany people to church and back to their cars after liturgy. Similarly, keep umbrellas on hand for that quick shower/thunderstorm that pops up and leaves people unprepared.

Kathy Nix of St. Matthew Parish, Cornubia, Queensland, Australia tells us that *“Anyone who comes to our parish – St. Matthew – for Mass on Sunday would be greeted by a member of the Parish Pastoral Council who hands out newsletters.”*

Likewise, Anne Pratchett from St. Quivox, Prestwick, Ayrshire, Scotland says: *“Our weekly bulletins and church notices are not simply left lying to be picked up. Everyone is greeted at the door and handed a bulletin so no-one enters without a member of the parish speaking to them.”* Anne continues to tell us more about the welcoming spirit at this liturgy time: *“After the family mass on Sundays there is the invitation to come to the adjoining hall and have tea and coffee. Father makes a point of inviting all visitors to the parish to join us. A large area is reserved for young families and set out with juice and biscuits plus tables are laid with paper and drawing materials for the children. It also provides a comfortable opportunity for young parents to meet and chat after mass while the children play happily and get to know each other.”*

- These ministries of hospitality are called to create an atmosphere conducive to the act of worship – the act where we are most genuinely one. The skills required are delicate ones: making people feel that the community is glad they came; that their presence is important to what is about to take place.

- Be alert to newcomers; show them a seat next to someone you know and introduce them.
- In addition to saying, “Good morning,” ministers of hospitality ask inviting questions, “How was your week?” “How have things been for you?” “I’m sorry, I don’t know your name...” (never say, “I’ve never seen you before...”).
- During the Sign of Peace, be especially alert to the presence of newcomers or visitors in the assembly. Go to them and exchange a greeting.
- Say good-bye to people, using their names you learned on their way in to liturgy.
- A helpful resource is available: *The Art of Hospitality* (a PowerPoint which was created by Fr. Eduardo Montemayor, SOLT, for the formation of ministers, especially ushers and ministers of hospitality) can be found at [www.janetschaeffler.com](http://www.janetschaeffler.com). Go to the “New Resources” section. Thank you to Fr. Montemayor for his graciousness in sharing this PowerPoint.

“We usually associate hospitality with a culture,  
a social practice, a more personal quality  
to be admired.

In western culture, where individualism and  
security seem to be priorities,  
we need to be more thoughtful about  
how to bring the welcoming of strangers  
into our daily way of being together.”

- Peter Block  
in *Community: The Structure of Belonging*

## All in the Gathered Assembly

- Welcome/hospitality is, of course, the work of all of us, not just those at the doors of church.

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- Alice Martin, Pastoral Associate at Holy Spirit Parish at Geist, Fishers, Indiana tells of woman who came to their parish. *“After she seated herself she spoke to the folks around her, told them she was not Catholic and asked that they show her what to do. She said that the parishioners’ warm, non-judgmental response to her was so inviting that she wanted to pursue becoming Catholic.”*
- A smile or nod of the head to those who come into our pew says a great deal. Hospitality might even call us to **move in to those empty middle seats**. For a personal reflection on this, read “Hospitality – Beyond Politeness” by Daniel Connors in *Today’s Parish*, October 2010.
- Sit in a **different pew!** It’s so comfortable to sit in the same place; yet new faces and different perspectives abound when you move to a different spot in church. Share the Sign of Peace with someone you’ve never seen before.
- The first part of the Mass is named the Gathering Rites because “gathering” names the purpose of these actions and prayers: “to ensure that the faithful who come together as one establish communion” (GIRM, #46). We exercise the ministry of **hospitality when we join together as one**, singing the gathering hymn.
- **Compliment a family** on how their young children behaved during liturgy. Often getting to church on the weekend can be a challenging experience for a young family! Affirmation – and a sincere feeling of “so glad you’re here” – may be the nudge they need that keeps them coming each week.
- Many survey responders commented that at the beginning of liturgy they invite everyone to say hello (and introduce themselves, perhaps commenting on a simple question) to those sitting around them. Vicki Hawkins of Nativity Parish in Brandon, Florida tells of going a step further: *“At the 10:30 Sunday Mass (our most ‘popular’) a young adult addresses the gathered to tell them a brief story about her/his week, and then encourages them to **share a brief story with their neighbor** that has the same emphasis – so for instance Emily welcomes everyone, tells them a story of how she saw someone at*

*her place of work (a public grade school) share gratefulness this week, and then asks the assembly to share their story of how they are grateful, or will be grateful.”*

## Especially for Newcomers and Visitors

- Take time and sensitivity for the newcomers, travelers and visitors who are among us each week.

Mary Robinson, OSU from Mary Mackillop Parish, Birkdale, Brisbane, Australia shares that *“at the end of Eucharist (each weekend liturgy, weekday liturgies, any special liturgies – e.g. Anointing Mass, Mass of Reconciliation), Fr. Anthony welcomes those who are visiting and invites them to sign the visitor’s book and take **a candle as a memento from the Welcome Table** which is outside the front of the church.”*

St. Matthew Parish, Cornubia, Queensland, Australia has a **“New Parishioners Book** at the back of the church in which new parishioners can write their details. We have one person on the Parish Pastoral Council in charge of making contact with them.”

Marianne Slattery relates the experience at St. Noel, Willoughby, Ohio in the Cleveland diocese which has recently experienced number of parishes closing/merging: *“The presider made a point of welcoming those who were looking for a new parish and encouraged them to consider St. Noel. We had a basket of flowers with a balloon tied to it each weekend for several months. The presider invited people to approach the balloon where a member of our Pastoral Council stood. These folks were very welcoming and available to answer questions any inquiring visitor might have.”*

At Our Lady of the Rosary, Caloundra, Queensland, Australia, Jo Ceglarski writes of their experience: *“We have certain people rostered to welcome everyone to Mass weekly and others are ‘spotters’ to see who is new to our Community, even if just a visitor. Those people make a point of having a chat with the newcomers that day.”*

- Mention newcomers, travelers and visitors in **the General Intercessions**. Do they “feel” – as soon as they enter - that whoever they are/wherever they come from they are sister/brother Christians and not simply strangers or visitors?

**A Nugget to Remember:** Throughout our constant endeavors, are we ever mindful, aware and respectful of **the differing responses from various cultures**, the changing face of our Church?

For instance, an usher touching someone on the shoulder, requesting them to slide over in the pew might be responded to differently from someone from a culture who does not like to be touched.



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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*.