



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

#8 - April 2011

A Royal Welcome: Some Secrets of Belonging (Part 6)

The December 6, 2010 newsletter from the Alban Institute (<http://www.alban.org/conversation.aspx?id=9336>) was entitled, “Top Ten Ways Congregations Shape and Are Shaped by Society” by Loren B. Mead.

It’s fascinating how many times hospitality was mentioned:

- **“Strangers meet on common ground.** ...*Can congregations open us up to at least civility to those beyond our community of family or friends? Dare we think of the possibility of a public world ruled by the values of hospitality? Can our congregations demonstrate that possibility to each of us personally and train us for that kind of public life?*
- **Fear of the stranger is faced and dealt with.** ...*Can our congregations be seen as safe places where we can reach across boundaries, where we can support experimentation? Can our congregations become intentional laboratories for exposing us to people outside our groups?*
- **Life is given color, texture, drama, a festive air.** *Every act of worship should be a laboratory in celebration of community. These dimensions in our congregations and in our communities give us opportunities to dramatize a oneness and commonality with others. ...*
- **People are drawn out of themselves.** *The locked doors and barred windows of city living, the residential sections protected by gates—these realities speak vividly of the isolation toward which our society pushes us. Congregations have a mandate to reach out and to bring in. We bear a high tradition of hospitality. In that sense, congregations are countercultural—or at least counter to the way the culture is drifting.*

As congregations reach out to the isolated, they become places where the isolated can engage with others. In a society with

strong pressures toward privacy, the public realm needs congregations to have vision to root people out of their hidden aloneness and train them for community....”

And so, once more we look at two crucial areas of parish life which enhance the welcoming, belonging, hospitality of our life together: the call to ministry and communications.

No one comes to this house who is not changed.
We meet no one here who does not change us.
How rich and long the hours become
how brief the years
in this house of gathering.
-Mary Sarton

Called to Ministry

In our best practices surveys, all parishes were unanimous in their agreement that one of the underlying, essential components of their parishes of welcoming was the **emphasis placed on lay ministry.**

“I think our parish is hospitable in that lay ministry is taken very seriously (as well as throughout the diocese) so people who are not involved have to actively choose to remain uninvolved.” (Lauren R. Ellis, St. Catherine of Siena Parish, Carrollton, Texas)

“Lay leadership is critical. This leadership is fostered by the priests of the parish and the bishop of our diocese who implemented a Lay Pastoral Ministry Program in the diocese. Even if we had all the priests we ‘needed’ our ordained ministry knows the importance of lay leaders taking responsibility, of using the gifts we have been given in service to the larger community.” (Vicki Hawkins, Nativity Parish, Brandon, Florida)

GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

Gift discernment is an all-important step in the process of inviting people to respond to their call for ministry. Many parishes are using the Clifton StrengthsFinders process developed by Gallup and outlined in *Living Your Strengths: Discover Your God-Given Talents and Inspire Your Community* by Albert Winseman, Donald O. Clifton and Curt Liesveld. For more information for the StrengthsFinder in the Catholic community, see <http://mccfcs.cloverpad.org/Default.aspx?pageId=140074>.

There are, of course, numerous ways to do gift discernment. A few, of the many, other processes available are:

- Called and Gifted from Catherine of Siena Institute (<http://www.siena.org/Called-Gifted/called-a-gifted.html>)
- Spiritual Strengths Finder (an online tool that helps identify spiritual strengths: (<http://www.healyourillness.com/page.asp?page=3304>)
- *Parish Ministry for Maturing Adults: Principles, Plans and Bold Proposals* by Richard P. Johnson. Appendix One: Spiritual Gifts Survey for Maturing Adults, pp. 107-113. (Twenty-Third Publications, 2007).

The December 2010 Stewardship newsletter of the Reid Group (http://www.thereidgroup.biz/thereidgroup/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=276&Itemid=394) tells us of St. Mary Parish in Seattle that created a process to help people identify and share their gifts within their parish and beyond. For the Time and Talent portion of their annual Stewardship appeal, they used the following process:

“Step 1: In the month before the appeal, four individuals are selected each week to offer a two-minute reflection on the meaning they experience from their service as lectors, greeters, committee members, etc. These reflections are also included as a bulletin insert the following week.

Step 2: On the appeal weekend, posters are placed around the church with a heading for each service opportunity the parish offers. Following the homily, parishioners are given seven minutes to “tour” the posters and sign up to renew or start a commitment to serve in one or more of these areas. There is also the option to put their name on the “I’m not sure” poster.

Step 3: People are thanked for their commitment to share their gifts and then called individually to start the process of serving in their chosen area.

Those who signed their names to the “I’m not sure” poster have the opportunity to talk with someone about where their gifts might best be used.”

It goes without saying that those in ministry – both within the parish and beyond - need to be affirmed and thanked (even though that’s not why they are doing it). See **GEMS #1** (www.janetschaeffler.com).

On John M. Rinaldo’s blog, Mpower28: empowering leaders to empower leaders (<http://www.mpower28.com/blog/?p=52>), he says – in this post, “Newborn babies and adult volunteers,” something which seems very obvious: *“We find it so natural to affirm our children for all the new things that they are learning, even when they fail at it. But with adults, we can’t bring ourselves to do the same thing. Not that we need to treat the adults we work with in ministry as newborns, but we should be intentional about praising and affirming them when they are learning new skills and become better leaders.*

Make a list of the adults that you work with in ministry. Next to their name, write three to five things that they should be praised for. Next time you work with them, affirm them for one of those things that you listed. You will find that they will be more motivated next time to do a better job at their ministry role and work to become better leaders. Why? Because we all respond to positive praise and affirmation.

Just don’t talk to them like you would a newborn.”

Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself,
your neighbor is the holiest object
presented to your senses.

- C.S. Lewis

Fr. Jim McDougall from St. Francis of Assisi Parish, Ann Arbor, Michigan, tells us that on Ministry Blessing Sunday every ministry is mentioned, resulting in one-third to one-half of the church standing at every

liturgy. When the names are listed in the Sunday bulletin each year, approximately 2300 people are listed in more than eighty-seven ministries and volunteer opportunities.

All of these stories/instances of **committed lay ministry** flow from what Robert Greenleaf wrote about – and many of us studied – in his classic, *Servant Leadership* (Paulist Press, 2002, 25th anniversary edition), which have contributed to the growth of parishes of welcome and belonging.

Now Dan Ebener has given us *Servant Leadership: Models for Your Parish* (Paulist Press, 2010). This book includes stories about servant leaders who emerge from surprising places, including:

- a woman who cleans the pews
- a man who grabs tools from his pickup truck to fix a door before Mass
- a dedicated group of catechists

Ebener includes stories of those who in leadership positions and how their actions affect a parish of belonging:

- a pastor who admits his mistakes
- parish leaders who give credit to others when things succeed
- those who model accountability when things don't work out

This reality that the call to ministry, the call to participation is crucial for a parish of belonging is not just anecdotal from our survey participants. In the book, *the Parish Management Handbook* edited by Charles E. Zech (Twenty-Third Publications, 2003), Michael Cieslak analyzed 55,000 questionnaires administered to diocesan parishioners in Rockford, Illinois. His findings contradicted the conventional wisdom that the quality of the liturgy is the best indicator of parish vitality. “That honor is reserved for the variables that measure leadership, he writes (p. 130), “especially the one measuring **encouragement for the laity to become involved.**” In vital parishes of welcoming/belonging, pastors and staffs encourage people to participate.

Communications as Hospitality

We could write books on this topic (and there are many available); it can be explored from various angles; it encompasses many things. We'll also explore this topic much more in the future; for right now, just a sampling.

- Our buildings/atmosphere were explored in **GEMS #5** (www.janetschaeffler.com). Our buildings communicate; what are they saying?
- Is there “code language” in your bulletins and newsletters, such as the “ICF dinner” or the “SCC gathering”?
- Can a visitor easily find the parish phone number, website, and name of a person to talk to if they are new to the parish?
- Are worship aids or projected materials printed clearly in type that is easily seen and read?

How we communicate to parishioners
and the greater community
determines, in large part, the degree to which
the parish will be of service to others.

- Judith Ann Kollar
in *A User-Friendly Parish:
Becoming a MORE Welcoming Community*

- Statistics say that most people – visitors and parishioners – today go first to a parish website before they come to the office or make a phone call.
 - What would they find on your website?
 - How user-friendly is it?
 - How welcoming?
 - How interactive?
- For some helps and challenging questions, visit: *Site Organic (Websites the Way God Intended)*: <http://www.siteorganic.com/support/tips.asp>.
- This website's last two points echo many of the points we've been reflecting upon in our last six issues:
 - “Summing up: the overall impression of the site must be of a gentle, loving, enticing welcome. But, of course, people then must actually receive a welcome! There are many shocking stories of first time visitors being only spoken to by an usher as

GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

they enter, if they are lucky. It ought to be self-evident, but all churches should train their members to speak first to someone they do not recognize after (and indeed before) any meeting, IN ADDITION to any formal system of greeters that is in place.

- *Sadly, it is this issue of welcome and assimilation that frequently breaks down. In a recent survey of people who stopped attending church after six weeks, 92% of them said it was because no one talked to them. How will churches grow if this is people's experience?"*
- For other helps with websites, visit:
 - Building a Better Church Website:
<http://www.sundaysoftware.com/image/web>
 - The Good News Web Designers Association:
<http://gnwda.org/index.html>
- More and more parishes are using social media, particularly Facebook, to connect with their parishioners. For specific information and help on why and how, see:
 - *What is a Facebook Page and Should Your Ministry Have One?* from Catholic Web Solutions (Sr. Susan Wolf, SND): <http://www.catholicwebsolutions.com/?p=896>. This article will take you, too, to several parishes which creatively use a Facebook page.
 - Recently Jonathan Sullivan hosted a helpful seminar on Reaching Parishioners with Facebook:
<http://www.jonathansullivan.com/2010/11/video-and-footnote-reaching-parishioners-with-facebook/>

- Even though technology is all-important, the key to communications is to use every means available! Have you considered and utilized:
 - Supermarket carts
 - Road signs
 - Water bottles
 - Pizza boxes
 - Pencils
 - Frisbees
 - Movies
 - Magnets
 - Your Web address on everything

A Timely Question

The Japanese earthquake/tsunami, the Mideast conflicts, the global economic climate (to mention just a few) are in the forefront of our news and create troubling questions for all of us.

Adult faith formation practioners know that real life issues, connected to faith, are the core of our "programs."

What practices have you been doing to

- address the questions
- dispel preconceived notions
- support your faith community in their anxieties
- care for the world community

Please send them to jansch@juno.com; we will share them in a future newsletter, spreading these effective practices.



Janet Schaeffler, OP
www.janetschaeffler.com ~ jansch@juno.com

Past issues of **GEMS** are archived at www.janetschaeffler.com.

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