

Some Innovative Options for Adult Faith Formation

People's faith grows continually, in many ways, in all kinds of places and contexts. Certainly the parish setting is one of the prime places! There are dreams of more and more creative ways to meet a wide variety of needs and interests. Here are just a few.

- 1) Designate October (or any month you'd like) -- but October seems like a good month -- children are back to school, people are settled into routines, winter weather hasn't set in, etc. -- as **Adult Faith Formation Month** in your vicariate. Offer a different topic/event in a different parish each night of the month. Be sure to publish a calendar of *all* the events for *all* the people of *all* the parishes -- and beyond.
- 2) **Leave your parish to learn.** Use your parish bus; rent one; use your own vans and travel. Tour; expand your horizons. Have you visited all the other churches in your vicariate? Do you know their history? Have you visited the oldest churches in the archdiocese? Catholic churches that might include different ethnic and racial populations? Have you visited the Protestant churches in your area? Jewish synagogues? Mosques? Have you been to Blessed Sacrament Cathedral? Sacred Heart Major Seminary? The Retreat Center at St. John's, Plymouth? Then plan a parish retreat on the inner spiritual journey, *Time to Go Within -- Where God Knows Me First*.
- 3) Have a **Sunday Sharing Session.** (Young or old, people who live alone say that Sunday afternoons are the loneliest times of the week.) Open a parish meeting room/gathering area for an hour just before dinner. After someone has read the Gospel for the day, invite those gathered to reflect on it in terms of something that is happening in the world.
- 4) Invite an **art exhibit on faith and God.** There may be many parishioners who have artistically portrayed their spirituality, their faith in God, through paintings, drawings, sculpture, or photography. Invite them to share that. The evening/day could be structured in various ways: time for people to meditatively browse, time for the "artists" to talk about their experience, an opportunity for all to try their hand at a creative experience, time for prayer, etc.
- 5) Put the **practical and spiritual together.** Parishioners gather at the parish and are provided with a map of a nature walk in your area (even if it's just through neighborhoods with trees and flowers that in our busyness don't usually get noticed), which also includes suitable places to stop (park benches, etc.),

reflect and share experiences. Before beginning and on one of the stops, the leader might share some input (e.g. Linus Mundy's *The Complete Guide to Prayer Walking*, Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996). After the walk and stop(s), return to the parish for lunch or snacks and sharing of the experience.

- 6) You **don't always need an "expert."** Plan your own parish "talk show" for Lent. Invite a panel of parishioners to gather each week to reflect and share stories from their life experience based on the theme of the upcoming Sunday Scripture readings. This would begin the evening followed with time, of course, for all the participants, in small groups, to share their own stories.
- 7) **Tables for Two** is an evening of sharing for married couples and/or engaged couples at a five-course dinner seasoned with guided discussion. The goal is to continue developing and enriching relationships. Often parishes schedule this event around Valentine's Day. (This type of format could also be used for Parent and Son/Daughter evenings to give either parent the opportunity to spend a quiet evening of sharing with a teenaged or older son/daughter.)
- 8) During Lent offer an adult formation "**mini-conference**" in your parish. Offer three things each night for a week. Won't that boost participation? When only one opportunity is offered, your audience is limited. With three choices to choose from, many more people will be attracted.
- 9) And last, but never least ... do you (your parish/diocese) have a guideline that states: "all gatherings of adults ... will include prayer and reflection, **and study....**"

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