



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

#100 - April 2019

A Best Practice: Conversations within the Community

This issue does not explore a happening occurring within a home, a parish or an(arch)diocesan setting. Rather, these events occur within a community gathering place and probably are not advertised as an adult faith formation gathering.

When I heard about them, though, I immediately thought: wouldn't it be very easy for parishes to replicate this?

- Does one of your parishioners own a restaurant?
- Do you have a friendly relationship with one of the restaurants in your community?
- Could you work with them to offer some opportunities like this – which would touch your parishioners as well as others in the community who would probably never come to your parish?



The Setting

Big Mama's Kitchen (<https://www.bigmamaskitchen.com/>) is a soul-food restaurant in Omaha, Nebraska (near Creighton University), begun by Patricia "Big Mama" Barron who was known not only for her good cooking, but also

for her friendliness, kindness and generosity. "Big Mama" always said she started the restaurant for two reasons:

- She wanted as many people as possible to enjoy the food she cooked.
- She wanted her restaurant to be a place where everybody in the city could come together. She hoped north Omaha could once again become the vibrant community she remembered from her youth.

"Big Mama" died on Good Friday 2018, but her daughters are committed to carrying on her good cooking and her community-building efforts.

Three Types of Opportunities that Have Been Hosted/Offered



Among the many efforts to create a place where everyone can come together, the restaurant offers the "Hungry Club" which meets the first Wednesday of every month from 12:00 pm – 1:00 pm. This is an opportunity for members of the community to come together and enjoy a delicious meal while listening to insights and information presented by guest speakers.

Some recent speakers have included:

- The executive director of YouTurn Omaha, which works with young people involved in violence by helping them develop strategies for success. (<https://youturnomaha.org/>)
- When Chelsea Clinton made a second campaign stop in Nebraska, one of the events was held at Big Mama's. (https://www.omaha.com/news/politics/chelsea-clinton-to-visit-omaha-lincoln-as-nebraska-caucuses-enter/article_c174019c-dd8f-11e5-a2e6-b3a419339205.html#.VtJomY2dHWI.facebook)

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Students in an Omaha Public Schools summer school program went to Big Mama's Kitchen for a history lesson. The students, in a class called "making invisible history visible," listened to Big Mama talk about her experience of growing up in Omaha and living in the city the past 70 years.

https://www.wowt.com/home/headlines/OPS_Students_Get_Tasty_Lesson_162358086.html



Big Mama's also offers space in the restaurant (usually one Saturday evening a month) to Black Men United for many of their presentations. BMU is structured around the conviction:

“The citizens of Omaha are deeply concerned with many issues that affect us locally, nationally and globally. As a community-based organization, we believe it is our responsibility to raise awareness of and facilitate discussion concerning issues deemed important by the citizens of Omaha, NE.”

Therefore, BMU sponsors a variety of talks, films, panel discussions and suggestions for action on economic, social, educational and political issues affecting everyone in Omaha.

Some of their recent topics have included:

- immigration reform
- improved public school buildings
- a number of political forums for all candidates running for public office

Many religious leaders and parish groups from various parts of the city attend these gatherings. The restaurant provides free homemade soup, corn bread and juice for participants.



A Growing Reality

Big Mama's reflects a reality that more and more people (and churches) are looking at: “Third Spaces or Places.” These are the informal public spaces between our two usual environments: home and work (and perhaps church). Third Spaces are the other spaces that connect people to each other, allowing them to recharge, pause, and then reengage the world.

One example of a contemporary Third Place is seen in bookstores with a café, spaces for reading, guest speakers and programs, and reading groups.

Churches are using the Third-Place concept to offer programs and activities, not just for their own people, but for the wider community.

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- Some churches are sponsoring activities which are conducted by people and groups in the community, such as a “faith and film” series, book clubs, guest speakers and life-centered workshops (marriage enrichment, parenting, divorce and separation, bereavement, life and career planning, financial planning, recovery programs, dealing with depression), and an “Introduction to the Christian faith course.”
- Some churches locate their Third-Place facility in the “marketplace”—in a coffee shop, a café or a store in a mall while other churches re-design space within their existing church facilities, transforming an old fellowship hall into a café where people can meet through the day and night and an indoor play area where children can play while parents gather.
- Some churches are “building” their Third Places with a café, bookstore, play space, and rooms for small group gatherings; and equipping their Third Places with Wi-Fi, flat screen televisions, computers, and couches.

Third places can also be online: <http://lifetreecafe.com/>. The Lifetree hour typically includes

- real-life stories on film
- presentation of interesting and relevant information
- conversation with others
- and helpful tips to take into their everyday lives

GEMS Wonderings and Suggestions

- Are you aware of formational opportunities similar to Big Mama’s in your community (at libraries, colleges, through school systems)? Are there ways you can promote/publicize it?
- Could you work with a restaurant to offer opportunities like this which would touch your parishioners as well as others in the community who would probably never come to your parish?
- Are there places in your area where “third places” are already happening?



Adding New Luster to Older GEMS

Several [past issues of GEMS](#) have focused on hospitality (#3-9; #15-18; #46-48; #56-58). As we prepare for the Easter season, Fr. Michael White suggests that it might be time to re-evaluate our attitude towards Easter guests: <http://nativitypastor.tv/?p=2358>



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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 in:

- *Deepening Faith: Adult Faith Formation in the Parish*
<https://www.litpress.org/Products/4652/Deepening-Faith>
- *The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation*
http://www.lifelongfaith.com/store/p25/The_Seasons_of_Adult_Faith_Formation.html and <http://www.lifelongfaith.com/2015-adult-faith-formation-symposium.html>