



# GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

*from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study*

#105 - September 2019

## A Best Practice: Reaching Out to Empty-Nesters

Some realities about adult faith formation today:

- Adults have different life tasks at various seasons of adulthood.
- All parts of life – all transitions – are sacred.
- Adults respond to formative opportunities when they are related to their everyday life and needs.
- Often learning opportunities are better responded to when they focus on a group with similar interests rather than “one-size-fits-all.”

Convinced of these realities, and becoming aware of the growing number of empty-nesters in her church, Dawn Saxton from Word of Peace Lutheran Church, Rogers, MN invited a group of parents who were empty-nesters for the first time to explore their needs and how their faith community could respond.

## Challenges and Opportunities

The group began by naming for themselves the challenges and opportunities that were embedded in this endeavor:

- Statistics – and their church’s reality – show that there is decreasing engagement in the church among midlife adults (Gen X). Many empty-nesters fall within this statistic.
- Empty-nesters are on a journey to a new phase of life – a journey that is very different from the previous 20 or so years. Because of that, they have questions, hopes, uncertainties, fears, and at times difficulties. Therefore, many welcome new learnings and support.
- Many adults – at this time in their lives – are reflecting anew on how their lives are making a difference in their world; their desire to contribute in meaningful ways is strong.
- Having no children or youth at home – after many years – these parents often find they have some of the time they always desired.

“Women are more likely than men to be affected; often, when the nest is emptying, mothers are going through other significant life events as well, such as menopause or caring for elderly parents.

Yet this doesn't mean that men are completely immune to Empty Nest Syndrome.

Men can experience similar feelings of loss regarding the departure of their children.”

*-Psychology Today*

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/conditions/empty-nest-syndrome>

## How Mid-Life Adults Learn

In addition to talking about their newly-experienced feelings and experiences, the group researched how mid-life adults prefer to learn. Some of their findings included the realities that mid-life adults:

- Experience diverse ways of learning; many prefer to learn by doing rather than just reading and listening; they are experiential learners, preferring lots of direct-experience activities
- Like to engage in shorter, episodic learning experiences (micro-learning) rather than committing to longer several-session opportunities
- Have been influenced (as all of us) by today’s digital world and prefer visual learning (images, videos, etc.)
- Look for experiences that are practical and relevant: What will I do with this learning? How will it influence/deepen my life?

# GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

- Desire to have discretion to complete tasks in their own way, on their own time
- Enjoy independent self-directed learning, including individual projects
- Use technology whenever possible, including online learning opportunities, videos, etc.
- Usually turn to digital resources over printed resources



“While the reality of an empty nest might feel negative to some, it really isn’t!

We are celebrating that we have raised our family and handed off the baton to the next generation.

Kim and I are choosing to view this next season of life as a wide-open opportunity for new avenues of ministry.”

- Rob Hoskins

## The Result of their Conversations

Through their sharing, research and dreaming, Emerging Eagles was born (<https://wordofpeacecyf.weebly.com/empty-nest.html>), a three-fold endeavor to respond to the needs of empty-nesters:

- Three gatherings a month
- Flowing from the reality that they might have a little more time now as an empty-nester, ideas for home use to go deeper in their faith are suggested
- For those who need/want help with this transition, online resources are available

## The Face-to-Face Gatherings

The three gatherings planned for each month center on learning, serving, and celebrating. The first season offered:

### September

- Learn: “Find Your Faith” – a discussion centered on re-discovering our personal faith which doesn’t center around the kids (“I am about to do a new thing.” Isaiah 43: 19)
- Serve: Cross Food Shelf
- Celebrate: Fall Grape Stomping Festival (Visit to local vineyard for fall festival/wine tasting)

### October

- Learn: “The New Normal” – Discovering Ways to celebrate your faith and new life, the gift of time and what to do with it (“There is a time for everything and a time for every season under the heavens.” Ecclesiastes 3: 1)
- Serve: Feed My Starving Children
- Celebrate: Gather at Cristin’s home to put together care packages for our kids away from home. Bring an appetizer and ten small care package items to share.

### November

- Learn: “Thanksgiving” – Discovering what matters most and what we are truly thankful for. (“Give thanks unto the Lord,

# GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

for the Lord is good and the Lord's mercy endures forever.”  
Psalm 136: 1)

- Serve: Bundles of Love
- Celebrate: Visit CHOW, the new chophouse in Elk River

December

- Learn: “While we Wait” – Discovering a renewed meaning in Advent, digging down to a more spiritual journey without the mayhem of activities. (The glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together.” Isaiah 40: 5)
- Serve: The Big Five – Tree of Warmth (Each couple brings a new hat, mittens, or scarf to donate. We will enjoy hot chocolate and Christmas carols as we wrap these items (and the many items donated by our congregation) for families in need.
- Celebrate: Attend “A Christmas Oratorio” by the Minnesota Orchestra.

Stay positive.  
Thinking about the extra time and energy  
you might have to devote to your marriage  
or personal interests after your last child leaves home  
might help you adapt to this major life change.

- Mayo Clinic

Some other activities which the group suggested for future months:

- Activities that are not family centered; activities that we can now do as adults who don't need to arrange for and pay for childcare
- Cooking Class
- Brewery tour/visit
- Museum Tour
- Movie/Topics on Tap type event

- Visit local arboretum
- Cross country ski around one of the lakes

## Resources for individuals to use to go deeper in their faith

The group felt strongly that this reality of “now more time” allows the opportunity for a deepening of the faith journey. The original resources placed on the website (as well as some additional ones) include:

**The Daily Examen** (This is a version of the prayer which St. Ignatius practiced.) <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen>

1. Become aware of God's presence.
2. Review the day with gratitude.
3. Pay attention to your emotions.
4. Choose one feature of the day and pray from it.
5. Look toward tomorrow.

## Daily Devotions

- Pray as you Go: <https://www.pray-as-you-go.org/home/>
- D365 App for Smartphone or Tablet <http://d365.org/>
- Bread for Today: <https://www.cssr.org.au/bread4today/>
- A Concord Pastor Comments: <http://concordpastor.blogspot.com/>
- Daily Disconnect Podcast: <http://www.carmelites.net/daily-disconnect-podcast/>
- Daily Prayer: <https://jesuitprayer.org/>
- Pray Online: <https://www.pray.com.au/>
- 3 Minute Retreat: <https://www.loyolapress.com/3-minute-retreats-daily-online-prayer>
- Sacred Space: <https://www.sacredspace.ie/>
- Praying Each Day: <http://www.prayingeachday.org/>

## Reflections on the Empty-Nest Syndrome

- [Empty nest devotion](#)
- [A Mom's Guide to the Empty Nest](#)
- [Finding Hope in an Empty Nest](#)
- [Renew Your Empty Nest Marriage](#)

# GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

- [After the Children Have Grown](#)
- [Dealing with the Empty Nest with Prayer](#)
- [The Empty Nest](#)
- [21 Things You'll Love about the Empty Nest](#)

People make a lot of jokes  
about the empty nest.  
Let me tell you, it is no laughing matter.  
It is really hard.

-Michelle Pfeiffer

## Resources for the Challenge of the Empty-Nest Syndrome

The third endeavor is to curate resources on the website for those who need/want help with this transition. The original resources placed on the website (as well as some additional ones) are:

### Articles

- [Empty Nest Syndrome: Tips for Coping](#) from the Mayo Clinic
- [The Eternal Struggle of the Empty-Nester](#) from the *New York Times*
- [5 Ways to Cope with the Empty Nest](#)
- [How to Deal with Empty Nest Loneliness](#)
- [Don't Get Stuck in the Empty Nest](#)
- [How to Cope with the Empty Nest and Stop Feeling Lonely](#)
- [Help for Empty Nesters](#)
- [How to Cope with an Empty Nest](#)
- [How Parents Can Cope with the Empty Nest Syndrome](#)

### Parenting Blogs

- [Grown and Flown](#)
- [Empty Next Blessed](#)
- [5 Verses to Ease the Loneliness of an Empty Nest](#)
- [Are You Facing an Empty Nest: 10 Scriptures You Need + Hope](#)

## GEMS Wonderings

- Dawn planned this with other parishioners. What endeavors in your parish can be planned – not just be staff – but with the intended participants?
- What other ministries in your parish can you link to/collaborate with?
- As we respond to the needs of empty-nesters, many of them are grandparents. You might want to revisit [GEMS #64-66](#).



Janet Schaeffler, OP  
[www.janetschaeffler.com](http://www.janetschaeffler.com)  
[jschaeffler@adriandominicans.org](mailto:jschaeffler@adriandominicans.org)

Past issues of **GEMS** are archived at [www.janetschaeffler.com](http://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](http://www.lifelongfaith.com/store/p25/The_Seasons_of_Adult_Faith_Formation.html) and <http://www.lifelongfaith.com/2015-adult-faith-formation-symposium.html>