



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

120 - August 20, 2020

Some Principles and Practices for These Times (Part II)

There are many guidelines and principles that focus our efforts in adult faith formation. Some are constant; others surface when we find ourselves in unprecedented times and unique circumstances.

In our July 21, 2020 issue (GEMS #117) we began to explore some of them. This issue continues that exploration with another – an 8th one, accompanied by some real-life practices (in purple font) adopted by parishes today which concretely and sensitively live them.

8- Especially at this time, the “content” that parishes are creating and/or sharing can be classified into three categories:

- Information
- Connection
- Inspiration

Let’s take a quick look at each:

Information: content that helps your community stay in-the-know (similar to what would be a parish bulletin). The best approach would be creating information that is specific to our parish (announcements/events), as well as curating/re-sharing more general information that would be helpful and supportive for people.

Christine Stillings, from St. Francis of Assisi Parish, Apopka, FL, began a daily (Mon-Fri) newsletter called "Day Brighteners" that was emailed to parishioners, especially to those who had participated in adult faith formation activities throughout the years.

Through this newsletter, Christine passed along:

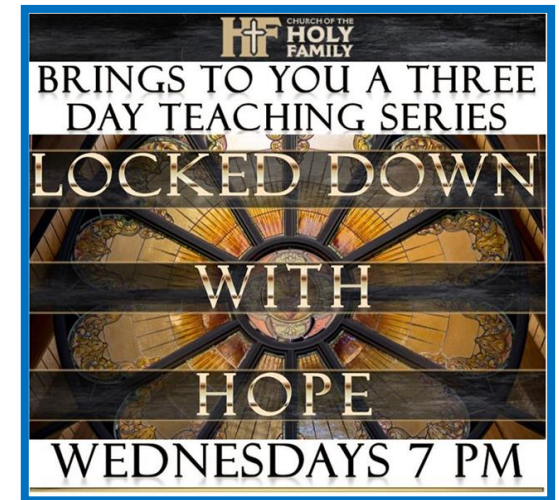
- reputable news resources on COVID-19
- spiritual and theological online resources and articles from various sites (especially many of the resources in past **GEMS**)
- links to "cheer you up" sites
- instructions on how to access their parish's online Masses
- the parish Facebook page

Christine soon found that some of the recipients were sending her material to pass along, which she gladly did, such as: “Bill sent a message from Team Missio, a ministry that offers (among many things) a link to sign up for daily messages from Pope Francis. Go to <https://www.missio.org/about.aspx>. As you explore the website, you should get a pop-up that invites you to sign up for the daily messages.”

Information would also include, of course, the various learning opportunities about our faith, our tradition. Two of the many happenings that have been planned:

- Holy Family Parish in Novi, MI created a three-week online series: Locked Down with Hope:

- Attitudes in Trouble
- Attitudes with Promise
- Attitudes for Action



- Lyn Pajk from Blessed Sacrament, Midland, MI recalls that they did some on-line catechesis during Holy Week and then Earth Day. They recorded videos for Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday which mixed music, prayer, reflection, and parish traditions together since they couldn't gather for the normal celebrations. Lyn reflects, “It helped to hold us together and to "remember" since our pastor hadn't even been with us a

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whole year when quarantine began and he didn't yet know the traditions particular to our community.”

For Earth Day the video reflected on Laudate Si' and ways that we can realistically participate in caring for God's creation. These videos go directly to the members of all of the adult formation groups as well as in the general Flocknote to the entire parish.

Connection: Parishes with a balanced content strategy don't just share information; they use their communication channels to build community.

In fact, right now, in our current circumstances, people are looking more for connection than content. Many parish leaders are writing reflections, soliciting input from parishioners, celebrating “wins” together and supporting people in this time of need.

Teri Burns from St. Robert Bellarmine Parish, Ada, MI remembers that they had "Watch Parties" via Zoom when Pope Francis offered his special prayers on the Vatican News site. “It was good to watch together in a group and then have a short discussion afterward.”

Roberta Balsewicz from Holy Spirit Catholic Community, Naperville, IL likewise mentions the importance of connection: “Early on we had sent a list of websites which broadcast liturgies, but as we were able to post our Masses online, parishioners shared how comforting it was to see their home church. They were not physically in the building, but the audio and visual connections were created to their spiritual home.

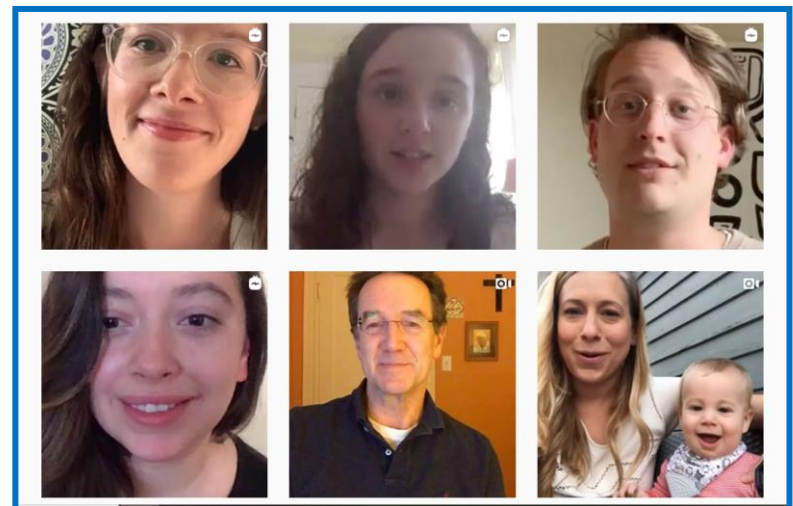
We found that our reach actually broadened; as people who were not members were watching Mass in their homes. Some families shared that their extended families were choosing to attend “together” at different home churches. Then they were virtually connecting for conversation. Evangelization of some reluctant family members was happening. New ways of gathering!”

A non-technology idea for connection which many parishes are doing: children/youth are sending cards and pictures to the older parishioners. Often then the elders have been calling the youth or mailing them letters of thanks.

Inspiration: During these times, people are grateful for support, inspiration and encouragement. There are numerous online resources that provide this; parishioners also appreciate it coming from people they know.

St. Cecilia Parish in Boston offers Midday Reflections. They began because the staff knew the people needed to see the pastor, so they encouraged him – in addition to weekend liturgy – to do a short reflection several times a week: some inspiration, a story, a reflection about this time.

They then realized it would be beneficial if it happened every day – and with different people. For months now different parishioners share a short reflection on what's helping them at this time. The most recent ones are on their website; all of them can be accessed at <https://www.instagram.com/saintceciliaboston/> (no account needed).



Resources for inspiration also abound on the internet and can be shared with parishioners:

- [Lessons from Staying at Home](#)
- [As the suffering of many weighs on me, I'm learning to pray again](#)
- [Resiliency in Times of Crisis](#)
- [Kindness Resources](#)

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- [Human Touch](#): A new serialized story of hope during the coronavirus pandemic, set in the moment we are all living through together. “Human Touch” is being written by Mitch Albom in the present, one week at a time.
- [A Meditation on the Love of God](#)
- [12 Spiritual Energy Boosters](#)
- [Pandemic Prayerbook](#)
- [Five Lessons to Remember When Lockdown Ends](#)

Next few issues

- Our next issue – in a few weeks – will continue to look at some more principles and practices for these times.
- The following few issues will continue to share some things that parishes are doing – or could be doing – during these times. If you have ideas/suggestions of things that are working for you (or what you learned from the things that aren’t working), I’d love to hear about them: jschaeffler@adriandominicans.org. (Thanks!)



Adding New Luster to an Older Gem

GEMS #70 explored Video Content from the Internet for Adult Faith Formation. For several videos with suggested reflection questions, see: <http://digitalfaithformation.org/category/videos/>

We can also find helpful and appropriate videos in TheoEd Talks which relate to various topics and themes that occur in faith formation. See especially *Jesus the Ingrate* which might change the way we think about gratitude: <https://vimeo.com/318281851>.

The full collection of TheoEd Talks can be found here: <https://theoed.com/>. The site also provides discussion guides for many of the talks, offering a set of reflection questions that help groups engage, explore, and respond to the topics addressed by the TheoEd speakers.



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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>