



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

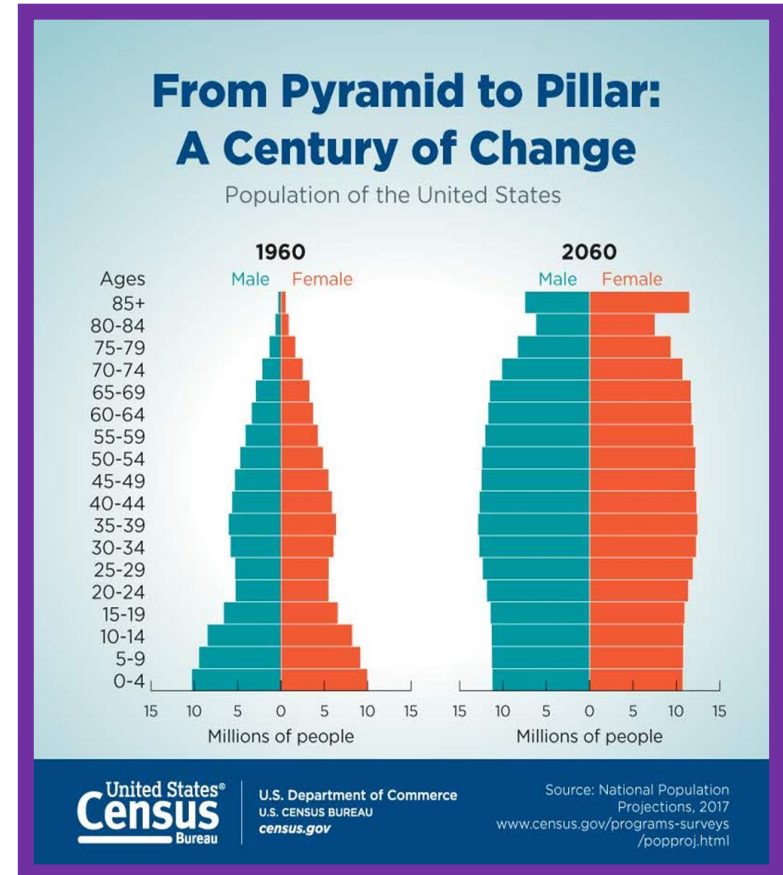
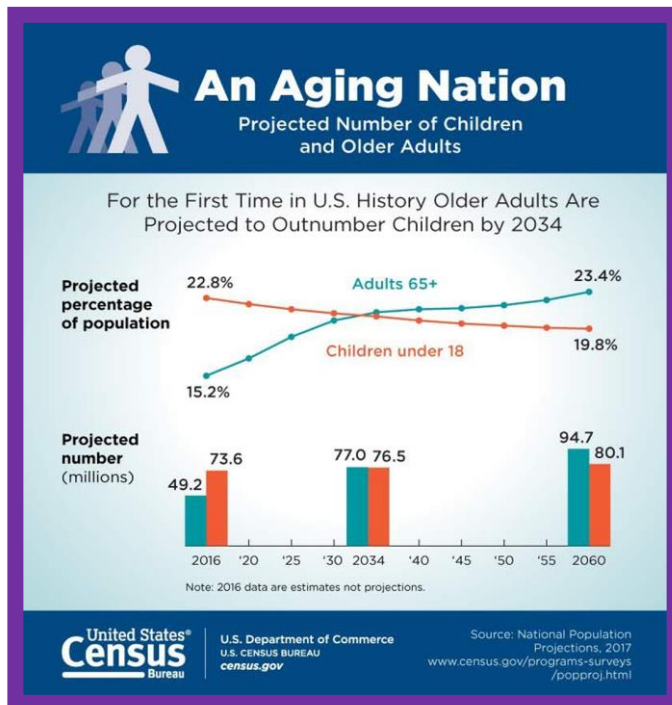
#127 - October 10, 2020

A Best Practice: Ministry to Maturing Adults at This Time (Part I)

Fortunately, in the last several years, more and more (arch)dioceses and parishes are paying attention to the needs of maturing adults, the fastest growing population in our country, certainly in our parishes.

In 2015 the number of Americans aged 65 and older was 47 million. By 2050, about 85 million Americans will be 65 or older.

The first wave of Baby Boomers reached full retirement age in 2011. For the next 11 years, 74 million Boomers will retire. This means that 10,000 new retirees are added to the Social Security and Medicare rolls each day. (<https://www.seniorliving.org/life/baby-boomers/>)



A Challenge

During this time of COVID-19, necessarily so, our attention has turned to those in their maturing and eldering years. As many things in these days, knowing what to do – and doing it – is a challenge.

The reality is that, in many places, even our more ‘active and healthy maturing adults’ are not yet coming to weekend liturgy and, understandably so, don’t want to be in groups for any reason.

Steve Helmich, chair of the Steering Committee for Ministry for Maturing Adults at St. Mark the Evangelist Parish in Indianapolis, IN, echoes the observations of many: “It is clear that this extended isolation is having an impact on folks and ‘loneliness’ and ‘depression’ are words we are hearing more often.”

This Issue and the Next


This issue and the following one (coming soon) explore some things that parishes and (arch)dioceses have been doing. (Many of the efforts, of course, are endeavors and practices that can be done all the time.)

- Which have you been doing?
- What other ones have you been doing?
- Which of these could you tweak and use to reach out and provide opportunities and support for your people?

You might also want to revisit some past issues of [GEMS](#): #64-66; #75-77; #83; #99 and #105.


Communication


So many have reminded us that the most crucial thing to do during these times is communication, ways of staying in touch with everyone, but especially our eldering adults.

 Anita Daroczy, director of adult faith formation at St. Mary of the Snows Parish in Milford, MI, explains what they (and many other parishes throughout the world) have done, “As a staff, we have committed to contacting all our parishioners via phone, starting with the oldest to the youngest. (We have 1800 families.) The format is set up to:


- Find out if they are ok
- Determine if they need anything
- Catch them up to what is available at St. Mary via the internet, e.g. Mass online, Q & A with our pastor via YouTube
- See if they have any questions

We have volunteers set up to shop or deliver to those who may not be able to get out at this time.”

 A parish in Campbell, CA reports that they started a project when shelter-in-place began called “Senior Connect” in which the teens called the maturing adults in the parish to say hello and do a “well-check;” they did this under the supervision of their parents. It is continuing!


 To support parishes in reaching out to eldering parishioners and their caregivers when in-person visits are not possible, the Archdiocese of Atlanta has created a “Spiritual Call Companions Ministry Guide.” Spiritual call companion encounters are meant to fill the gap between a friendly check-in and a visit from a trained and/or credentialed pastoral counselor, spiritual director, or chaplain.

This guide provides suggestions for organizing this ministry, tips for practicing effective listening, ideas for faith-sharing, and much more. (<https://archatl.com/ministries-services/senior-adult-ministry/homebound-outreach/>)

 The archdiocese of Atlanta also places a primacy on communicating with their parish ministers who are working with maturing adults throughout their parishes. Each month they initiate a Senior Adult Ministry Networking Call to share updates, best practices and identify questions and concerns.

Reaching Out

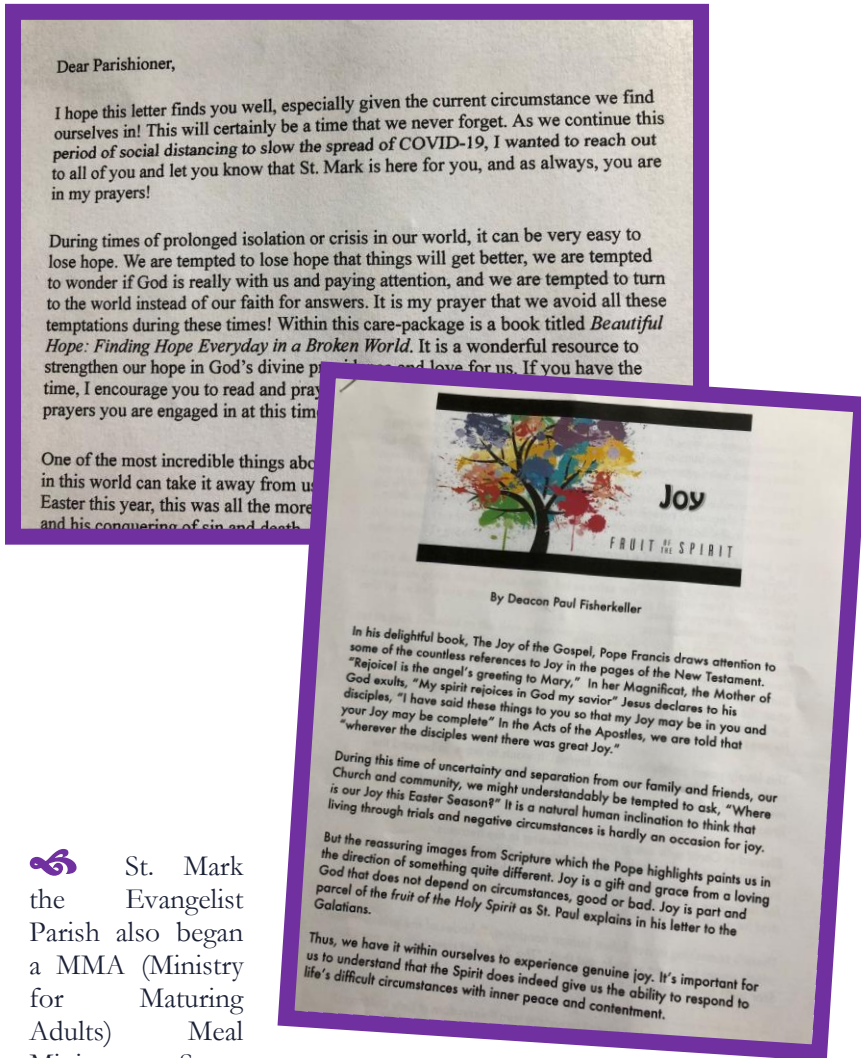
As the communication continues, parishes and (arch)dioceses have designed ways to reach out, to stay in touch, to provide support and help for people.

 St. Mark the Evangelist Parish in Indianapolis, IN prepared “care packages” for their maturing adults which contained:

- a letter from the pastor

GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

- a spiritual reading book on hope
- a guide to praying the rosary
- some writings by the deacon
- a book mark
- a guide to dealing with the isolation of this pandemic



St. Mark the Evangelist Parish also began a MMA (Ministry for Maturing Adults) Meal Ministry. Some MMA volunteers prepare meals twice a month and those meals are delivered,

along with some reading material, to the eldering members. The food which is delivered gives the folks enough for two or three meals.

They also have instituted a “Communion Companion Program” where those who are starting to attend liturgy pull the name of a maturing adult in the parish who is still isolating and who wants to participate in the program. The mass attendee consciously includes their “partner” in the Eucharist.

Another new effort at St. Mark the Evangelist parish is their MMA Card Ministry. One parishioner is an expert in making cards and writing notes. Volunteers were solicited to write cards on a regular basis. MMA volunteers come together to make hand-made cards. Another larger group of MMA volunteers pick up the cards and write notes to many of their parishioners.

The list of card recipients includes: parishioners in the hospital, parishioners in assisted living facilities, seminarians and others in religious formation, teachers at our K-8 Catholic school, parishioners living alone at home or in an apartment, and others.



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED



The coordinator of the Card Ministry has shared tips/guidelines for writing meaningful cards:

- Don't bother to buy expensive cards. Use hand-made cards by our MMA card-makers.
- Don't make a preliminary outline -it's fussy and takes too long.
- Do spend a minute or two focusing on the recipient before you start writing.
- Don't worry about crafting poetic or perfect sentences.
- Do speak from the heart.
- Do clear away distractions. Turn off the TV and put away your phone.
- Don't fret about your messy handwriting, and if you make an error, just cross it out.
- Don't expect a response-but enjoy a grateful surprise when you receive one.

Many parishes have begun or increased their efforts in a variety of services:

- Responding to requests for handyman services and grass cutting.
- When possible, taking Eucharist to those who are staying-at-home.
- Reaching out to adults who are isolating to share a Scripture reading and prayer – observing social distancing; on a phone call; on a Zoom call.
- Providing transportation to older parishioners to resumed liturgies and to doctor appointments.

The archdiocese of Atlanta has also taken seriously the call to reach out. The archdiocesan webpage, in addition to having links and information of interest to senior adults, also has an area of archived columns, Senior Side, with topics of special interest to senior adults during the pandemic. (<https://archatl.com/ministries-services/senior-adult-ministry/senior-side-column-archive/>)

This idea of reaching out does not come from a parish or (arch)diocese, but the actions/practices might be adapted within a parish.

DSCL (Detroit Society of Catechetical Leaders) provides formation gatherings with national speakers for parish catechetical leaders throughout the year. Because of COVID, those events have been put on hold for the time being. In a letter to all members, they said, "During the summer, the board of DSCL met to assess the DSCL's role in ministry at this time – *What do you need? What can we do to help you?*"

GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

From their prayerful discernment, they have committed to three actions. (How might these be tweaked and practiced within your parish ... for your older adults and/or for all parishioners?)

- Knowing that finances are tight for many people, they waived all dues for DSCL members, making everyone an automatic member.
- They designed and implemented a prayer calendar for the year, which each DSCL member (and their staffs) will be prayed for on a certain day of the year. Every day at 3:00 pm, the entire DSCL board will stop whatever they are doing (in their own parish ministries) and pray for the catechetical leader (and staff) designated for that day.

The full calendar and the prayer was included in the letter to each member.

Good and loving God, we lift up our sisters and brothers. Walk with them this day. May they take your hand and be led by your Holy Spirit. Fill them, inspire them and free them to respond generously to your call. We know that you desire their deepest joy, and it is only in your company that their souls will be satisfied and their lives find meaning and purpose.

- The Board also committed themselves to send periodic short emails “bursting with things to uplift you: to make you smile and even laugh. ... We even have plans to surprise you with postal mailings to encourage you....”

Some Resources and Reflections

- [‘I Like It, Actually’: Why So Many Older People Thrive in Lockdown](#)
- [The pandemic isn’t making ageism worse. It’s exposing it - and that’s a good thing](#)
- [Caring for Wellbeing of Older Adults During COVID-19](#)

Our Next Issue

Having explored communication and reaching out in this issue, in our next issue we will look at:

- Technology: Its Promise and Its Challenge
- Some Endeavors and Programs



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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>