



# GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

*from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study*

#135 - February 1, 2021

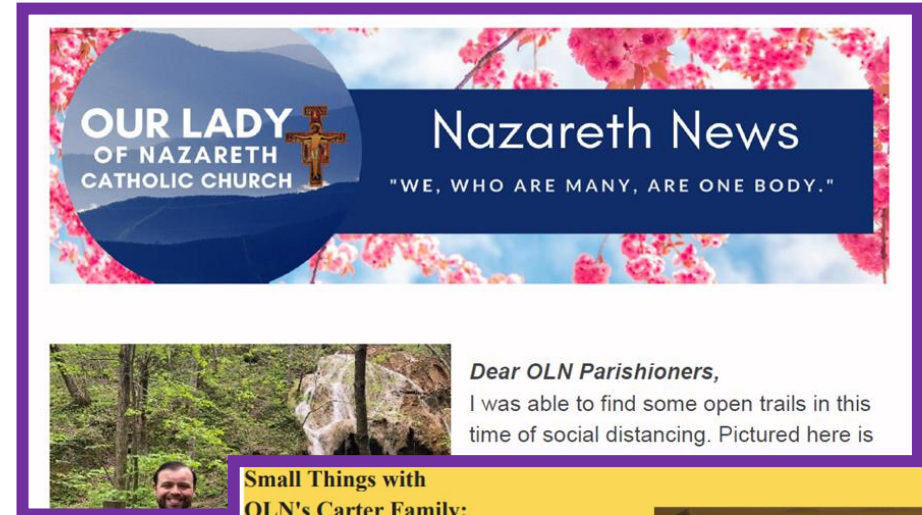
## Best Practices: Some Things These Pandemic Times Have Taught Us (Part I)

For many of us, these times have caused us to learn new things, new methods. In the midst of many challenges, we have discovered new insights, new practices. These realities are not only true for these times but for the days, months, and years ahead.

### 1- We have discovered or re-learned the necessity of constant communication.

Many parishes – even before the pandemic - have used an online newsletter (in addition to the Sunday bulletin). During the time of COVID-19 these continued to be essential; many other parishes began them for the first time.

- In GEMS #118 we read about Christine Stillings, from St. Francis of Assisi Parish, Apopka, FL, who 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.
- Janette Davidson, Family and Sacramental Minister at Catholic Community of North Harbour, New South Wales, Australia, tells us, "I forwarded your resource ideas to parents. I kept in contact via email with all the parents with children involved in our parish based, family-centred children's sacramental program. I emailed parents each week with ideas and a children's liturgy page."
- The newsletter (illustrated in the next column) from Our Lady of Nazareth Parish in Roanoke, VA is emailed to everyone through Flocknote. A pdf version can be found on their website for folks that are not part of their Flocknote system (which is voluntary). Frequently this newsletter is printed and mailed to those who do not have email.



*Dear OLN Parishioners,*  
I was able to find some open trails in this time of social distancing. Pictured here is

Among many items, the newsletter keeps people updated about the parish events that are happening face-to-face and virtually.

**Small Things with OLN's Carter Family:**

Check out this footage of OLN Youth "chalking" the parish parking lot. It was nice to see some students outside for some socially-distanced summer fun:)

**OLN YOUTH**  
OUR LADY OF NAZARETH  
ROANOKE, VA

**This Week:** We are filming an OLN YOUTH worship project! If you are in high school or recent alum, dance and want to participate, please email Meg!

**Next Week:** Stay tuned for another edition of OLN Youth Bingo & a Service Project to make cards for the home-bound:)

**Parent Survey:** (Click below)


**Survey**

# GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

- St. Clement Parish in Chicago, IL offers three newsletter lists:
  - The Plaza: weekly e-newsletter sharing general parish updates and offerings
  - Service Opportunities
  - Young Adult Community (YAC): ministry geared toward 20s/30s

During the stay-at-home time of the pandemic Zoom visits with the staff were encouraged.

**Virtual Office Hours**



We miss seeing your smiling faces! Sign up for 15-minute Zoom visits with Fr. Rex, Rachel, and Barbara, and let us know how you're doing! Use the following links to sign up:

- [Click here](#) to sign up with Fr. Rex Pillai, Administrator [Tue, Wed, Thu]
- [Click here](#) to sign up with Rachel Espinoza, Director of Children & Family Catechesis [Mon]
- [Click here](#) to sign up with Barbara Silva, Director of [Tue, Thu]

- Many parishes are sending regular cards to the homebound and including bulletins and other materials, greetings and pick-me-ups.
- Judy Cooney, Director of Faith Formation and Youth Ministry from Blessed Trinity Catholic Community, Missoula, MT, shares that
  - the pastor, Father Ed Hislop, has been calling the more mature parishioners
  - letters were mailed to parishioners several times with updates
  - the bulletin continued to be published online
  - extra resources of many types (links to county health department updates, articles, songs, etc.) were made available on the parish website
  - frequent updates were provided via the My Parish App
  - when they were limited to Mass for 25, they called parishioners (in alphabetical order) to invite them to Mass which also provided outreach to all parishioners

## 2- Communication, of course, has not just been newsletters, emails and online communications, but person-to-person contact through phone calls.

As mentioned, just above, many pastors and staffs – similar to Father Ed Hislop – have called their parishioners, especially those in the older age group.


Roberta Balsewicz, Director of Faith Formation, relates the response of Holy Spirit Catholic Community, Naperville, IL with their Comfort Calls. “We started early on having staff members divide up the parish database and personally called each and every household. We just had chat time with them. We asked how they were doing, listened and made notes. If there was a need, we assisted them.

From connecting computers to providing food. We shared where to get blessed palms, how Mass would be celebrated, what groups were able to move on-line and how our community would be able to worship. For the most part, the calls were received with gratitude that the parish really cared for their members. Staff took time with each of the 2500 registered households.”


**How to Help**  
*Answering our Call to Service while Sheltering-in-Place*

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact our community, the needs of local organizations that serve the poor and vulnerable are growing rapidly.

To find out how you can assist efforts to feed, clothe, house, and otherwise support those in need across the city (and around the world) through volunteer opportunities, in-kind donations, and financial contributions, take a look at our **How to Help Guide**. This document is being updated regularly, so check back often!



**Virtual Ministry of Care:**  
Thank you to the more than 55 volunteers who have signed up to participate in our Virtual Ministry of Care. Outreach via phone, email, and personal letters to our community members is ongoing. If you would like to assist in this effort or if you know of someone in the parish who needs help,



In addition to parish events (virtual and face-to-face), all three newsletters continually invited parishioners to service.

# GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED



Fr. Clint Ressler, pastor of St. Mary of the Miraculous Medal Parish, Texas City, TX has been riding his bike around the parish; sometimes stopping at 110 families in one week. With masks and social distancing on the porch, he visits with them for a few minutes, listening to their experiences, concerns and happy moments, blessing them before he's on his way to another parishioner.

Blessed Sacrament Parish in Midland, MI has plans to continue connecting with parishioners. Lyn Pajk, director of faith formation, explains: "We are trying to get more serious about walking beside/accompaniment ministry for newly married and young families. We will be calling all of our families who have had babies baptized in the last four years to see how their parish can support them."

Blessed Sacrament also has a Heart to Heart initiative of writing letters and calling parishioners who they have lost track of or who had lost track of the parish.

Recently I took my car in for an oil change. The owner told me how, during the beginning days of the pandemic, he called his regular customers to see if they needed any routine maintenance or repairs on their cars. For those who did, they picked the car up, performed the service, returned the car and sanitized everything before returning the keys. Do we, in our parishes and (arch)dioceses provide this type of "customer service?"

- 3- **Many leaders and parishes were surprised that the numbers of people increased in online opportunities;** more watched online liturgies than the numbers who were participating in person on the weekend.

There are probably several different reasons to explain this experience – which has occurred for multiple parishes.

Kris Rooney, director of adult faith formation at St. Kateri Tekakwitha Parish, Schenectady, NY recounts that "while the parish's RCIA process continued online, surprisingly there was an increase in inquirers over the pandemic! I think many people are turning inward, wanting to pay attention to what's really important. They want to address their fear."

One of the implications, of course, to the large numbers for online liturgies and formation is that parish ministry and adult faith formation for the future needs to be both face-to-face and virtual. When we do get back to whatever will be "normal," we will have a whole culture even more aware of and dependent on the Internet than before the pandemic. This will impact the way we engage our parishioners. We can't expect people to walk away from communication technologies that have become indispensable to them.

Kris explains how they have now been moving into hybrid programs. "Our Scripture Group, a mom's group, a book group and a contemplation group had been meeting regularly through Zoom or Google Meets; in mid-June we began a hybrid of online and in-person with up to seven people. The mom's group is meeting outside with their children, but having a separate Zoom call for just the moms on a Saturday morning."

Heather Owens, director of religious education at Parish of the Immaculate in Owensboro, KY, remarks, "I am so proud of our Thursday morning Scripture Study: fifteen men and women who have been together ten years reflecting on scripture. At the beginning of COVID-19 none of these individuals, ages 50-89 could Zoom. Now, they all can, and do.

We do a Zoom/in-person meeting using a computer and TV screen so everyone can see everyone; several people still Zoom in each week while most come in-person with great social distance precautions, temperature checks and a health questionnaire. We have not lost one member during COVID-19 because they were already a tightly-knit community."

This hybrid was developed by Heather's predecessor, Diane Willis. New in her position, Heather is grateful for "also not losing any members during the transition in facilitators."



# GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

4- As we mentioned in GEMS #119, many people, at this time, are looking for connection rather than content.

Many parish leaders are writing reflections, soliciting input from parishioners, celebrating “wins” together and supporting people in this time of need.

Stephanie Holden, adult ministry director at the Catholic Church of St. Ann, Marietta, GA, echoes what many have said, “Our parish calls itself a family and people want to connect with each other.” A few of their many attempts to help people be connected/able to see each other can be seen on their YouTube channel:

- [St. Ann's: A parish family](#)
- [St. Ann's Preschool: Hello from our staff](#)
- [Mothers' Day tribute](#)
- [Fathers' Day tribute](#)

As many parishes did, several hundred parishioners from Holy Spirit Catholic Community in Naperville, IL electronically sent their pictures to the parish, which were printed and taped to a large section of the pews. The priests appreciated having reminders of their parishioners in the church with them. People appreciated knowing that they were needed in church.



## Adding New Luster to Some Older GEMS

In **GEMS #36** we looked at the growing practice of choosing one word to guide us through a week, a month, or a year. This [recent article](#) shares one person's experience.



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>

