



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

#137 - March 1, 2021

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

In our February 1st issue we began to explore some new things we have learned, new methods we have used. 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.

5- We've been called to discern where we are, what we're going to do.

In "Leading Beyond the Blizzard" (<https://journal.praxislabs.org/leading-beyond-the-blizzard-why-every-organization-is-now-a-startup-b7f32fb278ff>), Andy Crouch, Kurt Keilhacker, and Dave Blanchard analyze three responses to the pandemic through the images of **blizzard**, **winter**, and **ice age**.



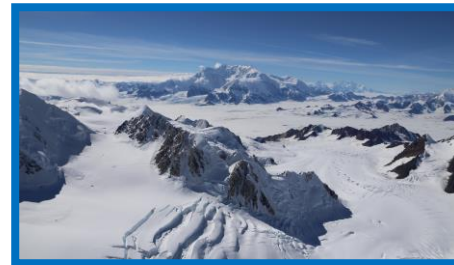
We can't go out in a **blizzard** because of zero visibility and hostile conditions. In a blizzard "we acknowledge that things are very difficult, provide emotional and practical support for immediate needs, and urge people to take extraordinary measures

that not only would be unthinkable in ordinary times, but are unsustainable for long periods of time. If the crisis generated by COVID-19 is a blizzard, it will be over soon, we will all emerge from our shelter, and resume life roughly the way it was before. Our job in a blizzard is to wait it out."

We can go out during the **winter** but not for long. In order to survive, we need to wear protective clothing and check the forecast for storms. "Winter might begin with a blizzard, but it is a season lasting months, not a single event. In cold climates, winter means that periodic acute events (blizzards) punctuate a continuous period in which human activity must adapt to bitterly



inhospitable conditions. This is almost certainly the reality of COVID-19 in the United States and many other countries. This will not be an event lasting a few weeks."



In an **Ice Age** things aren't the way they were: things don't grow the way they used to. To live in this, we need to find new ways to live and to thrive, to adapt and rebuild.

"The metaphor is obvious. Just as winter is more chronic and long-lasting than a blizzard, and requires different sorts of adaptation, which are in many ways more far-reaching than merely hunkering down for a few days or weeks - so there are even larger-scale events that reshape the climate through countless successive seasons. A generally accepted timeframe for the wide deployment of an effective vaccine - though there are huge uncertainties here - is 18 months. But 18 months is not a season - it is, for many purposes, more like an age or an era. In this little ice age life will be disrupted in significant ways for a longer period of time."

We have learned that we are not going back to normal. More and more each day, it seems that this pandemic is not just something to get through for a few weeks. It is an economic, cultural, political, and religious blizzard, winter, and beginning of a "little ice age" - a change unlike anything we've experienced in our lifetime that is likely to affect our lives, societies, and the church for years.

People survive the winter by building for the ice age. For us, as catechetical leaders, we have a unique opportunity to do all that is necessary to nourish our core mission: making disciples and nurturing faith for a lifetime. We can redesign our ministry for the beginning of an "ice age" that will last for some time to come.

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- How do you (and your parish/{arch}diocese) view the pandemic – as a blizzard, winter, or ice age?
- What will that mean for your plans and strategies for adult faith formation in these times?

6- We've been more-than-nudged to re-examine and plan our approaches and strategies.

Heidi Campbell, in her article which appears at Global Currents, the University of Notre Dame - "Distancing Religion Online: Lessons from the Pandemic Prompted Religious Move Online (<https://contendingmodernities.nd.edu/global-currents/distancing-religion-online-lessons-fromthe-pandemic-prompted-religious-move-online>) – reflects on the challenges and opportunities that face religious communities and their leaders as they move from traditional in-person forms of communal gathering to online forms.

Heidi identifies three strategies that churches utilized for moving worship online:

- Transferring
- Translating
- Transforming

Each of these strategies also describes the move of faith formation programming from physical spaces to online spaces.

- **Transferring:** This approach attempts to replicate the traditional service online as closely as possible. For instance, setting up a single camera in the center of an empty sanctuary, attempting to get a wide angle shot of a service conducted as if it were any other gathering.
- **Translating:** Another approach is focused on translating and adapting certain elements of the traditional in-person services, such as communal singing or liturgical readings, into a space constrained by camera angles or the screen dimensions of the streaming platform.
- **Transforming:** With this approach, leaders reflected both on what new forms of gathering digital technology could facilitate, as well as on the needs voiced by their parishioners for online experiences that would

help support and build community. Transforming worship online looked like a pastor turning his home study into a space where he could give nightly "fireside chats" to the parish, responding to the issues people had voiced to him that day via phone calls, emails, and texts.

Does this moment give us an opportunity to re-evaluate our models of ministry, our approaches to adult faith formation, to determine if we're meeting people's desire for connection and community?

- **How did your church move faith formation online: transferring, translating, or transforming?**



“...innovative ideas require some thought. They also require creativity and risk. But don't be afraid. We have been given a significant opportunity. Rarely do we get the time and space in ministry to dream. Asking 'What if...?' can open up all kinds of creative possibilities.”

Mimi Larson

7- These times provide the opportunity to imagine and plan for a new future.

Mimi Larson, in "How Your Children's Ministry Can Emerge Stronger and Better After COVID-19 (<https://network.crcna.org/childrens-ministry/how-your-children%E2%80%99s-ministry-can-emerge-stronger-and-better-after-covid-19>)," summarizes what has been happening: "In these past weeks, we have all worked hard to pivot, recreating our face-to-face ministries either online or in other creative ways. But we will not be going back to the same world - we will emerge from this pandemic in a world that has been profoundly changed."

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Les McKeown challenges our approach of pivoting during these times (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vfB3lM6kHj0>): it's not enough to pivot. Pivoting involves keeping our eyes on what we have been doing. Rather, can we look forward to a time we've never encountered before; can we be innovators, imagining new ways of ministry, of adult faith formation?

- **What would it look like to rethink how adults grow in faith?**
- **What might it look like if adults had opportunities for growth 24/7?**

8- Compassionate staffs and pastors who listen, who understand the needs and questions, the challenges and joys of the people with whom they walk on this faith journey are best equipped to lead in these times.

Pastors and staffs have probably ministered in the last few months in the most challenging environment we've experienced. Among so many, they have had difficult decisions to make:

- Should we close our buildings?
- How do we set up streaming?
- When/how should we re-open our buildings?
- Should faith formation be at the parish or online?
- How can we address racial equality in a way that is helpful?

Those parishes who are sensitively responding, who are thriving, are the ones who have approached their decisions with a rigorous, careful process that included many voices and data. Working collaboratively as staff, involving parish leadership and asking about the needs and opinions of the parishioners (through phone calls, visits, emails and surveys) result in decisions based on concrete information. Asking our parishioners for input on everything from online faith formation, to job loss and financial disruption, to protesting racial injustice helps leaders know their people better so they can make more informed decisions.

Listening to everyone means:

- our decisions will consider a wider range of factors
- we will reduce our blind spots
- we can stop guessing

Andy Crouch, Kurt Keilhacker, and Dave Blanchard in "Leading Beyond the Blizzard" remind today's leaders of the most important reality:



This time poses the greatest leadership crisis any of us have faced. It can be a moment of amazing creativity, though it also is going to be a time of unavoidable pain and loss.

We will discover that while many resources are suddenly unavailable to us, the most essential resource is still available, and the most important reality has not changed.

The reality is that God has called us to a time like this, given us a mission and a community to serve alongside, and we still have the most important resource, which is trust in the context of love.

Everything depends on how quickly and thoroughly we move to build on that resource, starting today.



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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>