



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

165 – May 1, 2022

A Best Practice: Pathways to Discipleship

GEMS #44 and #67 explored processes and programs that various parishes have used which design their offerings around one theme, thus integrating and connecting all the endeavors.

This issue shares the experience of Blessed Sacrament Parish Community, Midland, MI, which did new planning that coordinated everything around the theme of discipleship. Lyn Pajk, Director of Faith Formation, explains that beginning in September 2018, the parish endeavored to create new pathways for discipleship, becoming “a church on the move.” A multi-path approach invited parishioners to explore the reality of discipleship in various ways.

The Approach

As the pastoral staff and parish leadership reviewed the opportunities that were available for ongoing growth in faith, they realized that even though they were multiple, it was pretty much the same people who showed up for everything. They knew that if they wanted different results and hoped to impact a wider audience, particularly those in their 30’s and 40’s, they needed to rethink the types of programs and experiences that were offered.

They were convinced that people need to be met where they are physically and spiritually. They asked themselves: How do we grow a church of disciples rather than a church of members?

Focusing on this theme of discipleship, all the plans and offerings were named “Pathways to Discipleship.” This name is a nod to the reality that everyone does not experience the presence of God in the same way or is comfortable with sharing their faith journey in every setting. Thus, multiple pathways are offered, hopefully something for everyone.

In planning this approach, the dream was that many of the parishioners would choose at least one way to strengthen their commitment to being followers of Jesus. As the year progressed, Lyn said, “We are seeing that people who haven’t previously been engaged in opportunities or haven’t for quite some time are finding ways to connect with one another and reconnect with their faith.”

PATHWAYS TO DISCIPLESHIP
WHICH PATH WILL YOU CHOOSE?

SALVATION HISTORY THROUGH STORY AND SONG

- Begins Oct. 1
- Tuesdays @ 7pm - Blessed Sacrament or Tuesdays @ 10pm - Pizza Sam's
- 12 session, no homework Bible study
- Bible beginners and Bible scholars welcome on this journey of the Word

LAIDBACK BOOK CLUB

- Starts Oct. 28.
- Online study of Maria Shriver's I've Been Thinking
- Buy your copy and join the FACEBOOK group to add your thoughts
- Advent gathering to continue the conversation in person

THEOLOGY BY THE GLASS

- Begins Nov 14 – 7:30-9:30pm
- Hosted by Fr. Kevin and Lyn Pajk @ Grape Beginnings on Main St
- Join in the conversation around the topic: Where and how do you experience the presence of God in your daily life?
- No RSVP necessary – conversation is free, but the wine, water, and snack are not

THE JOURNEY

- Begins Jan. 22
- Tuesdays @ 7:00pm - Blessed Sacrament
- Six-week study to encounter Jesus on THE JOURNEY
- EVERYONE is invited to walk along on this journey

"POP UP" SMALL GROUPS

- Self-directed small groups beginning the week of March 3
- Groups will meet Monday and Tuesday evenings, Thursday mornings before and after Mass, and Sunday between Masses and during Youth Ministry
- Six-week study of A Well-Built Faith by Joe Paprocki
- All groups are formatted the same so if you can't make one time, jump into another!

WATCH AND PRAY: A RETREAT FOR MEN AND WOMEN

"Jesus said to them, 'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.'" Mark 6: 31

The morning of Saturday, April 13 at the Parish Center

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT LYN PAJK LYNP@BLESSED-MIDLAND.ORG OR CALL THE PARISH OFFICE

WHAT'S NEW & WHEN

- **September 16:** Catechetical Sunday, Teaching Mass, the Daily Examen, God Sightings Parish Wide Project, On the Go Sunday Connection, Weekly Preparing for the Word Resource
- **September 22:** Community walk/bike from Tridge to Cottage Creamery
- **September 27:** Presentation about Pope Francis's Exhortation on Holiness
- **October 2:** Salvation History through Story and Song 12 week series begins
- **(October 13:** Men's Morning of Reflection)
- **(October 20:** Women's Morning of Reflection with Sr. Janet Scheffler "Women in Discipleship")
- **October 28:** Laidback Book Club Begins
- **November 14:** Theology by the Glass (and on the second Wednesday of each month through June)
- **December:** Sacred in the Secular #1: Photography Project
- **January 22:** THE JOURNEY begins
- **March:** Sacred in the Secular #2: Running Rosary
- **March 5:** Pop-Up small faith groups begin
- **(March 9/10:** Men's Christ Renews Weekend)
- **April 13:** Watch and Pray Retreat Morning for Men and Women
- **(May 4/5:** Women's Christ Renews Weekend)

May 2019-December 2019: What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus



The Beginning

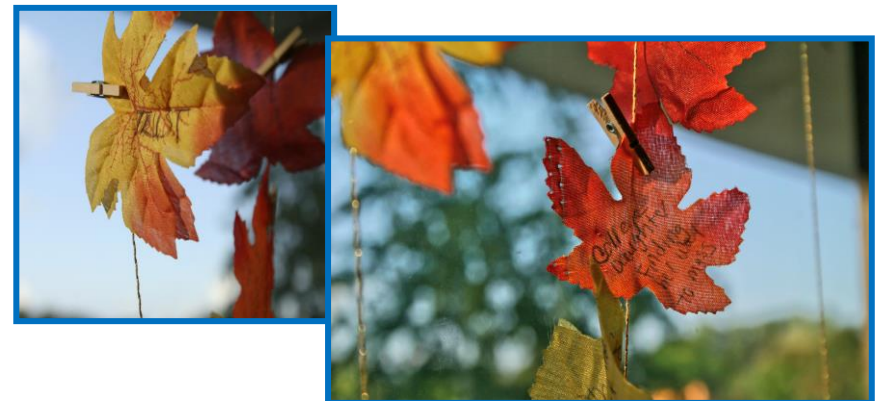
On September 16, 2018, Catechetical Sunday, the Pathways to Discipleship initiative was launched with a teaching Mass to help parishioners recall why we gather and the importance of encountering Jesus in the Word, the Eucharist and one another.

After liturgy, three items were given to everyone:

- professionally-printed flyers with the main opportunities for the upcoming year
- a magnet asking, "How did you experience God's presence today?"
- a copy of the Daily Examen to help people spend some intentional quiet time looking for the moments during the day when they felt God's presence.



The intent for the first six months of the initiative was to help people practice an awareness of the presence of God in their daily lives. For the first six weeks parishioners were invited to record these encounters on (paper) fall leaves each week at Mass. They were then hung on golden thread strung in the church's main vestibules' windows.



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

Community Walk/Bike

This event was planned for the purpose of building relationships among the parishioners while out doing something in the larger community. The planning committee's intent was also to promote the notion that everything doesn't have to happen at the church or parish center. People are already out walking and biking the rail trail and gathering at the ice cream shop, why not do it together as a parish family and also use it as an opportunity to provide for the hungry?

One of Blessed Sacrament's parishioners owns the ice cream shop and gave everyone coupons for free small cones or \$2 off any other treat. The participants were also invited to bring a can/box of food to donate to the Emergency Food Pantry network.



Salvation History through Story and Song

This was a 12-week stroll through the main stories of Salvation History not to dissect them or understand every nuance, but rather to begin to encounter God through the Bible by listening to the stories of our ancestors of faith and seeing how God was working in the lives of people 4000 years ago and how

God continues to be with us now. Storytelling, music, object lessons and hands-on activities were used to illustrate the stories of God's love, mercy, and forgiveness.

As the time concluded, each member of the two groups submitted their favorite Christian/liturgical song(s) and Lyn made them each person a CD of the songs that continue to inspire them as they live out the next chapter of God's great love story.

One of the new twists to this Bible Study is that the evening session was offered at the Parish Center, but the afternoon session was offered at their local pizzeria. Pizza Sam's offered the parish the use of their meeting room free of charge for twelve weeks. The group met from 1:00 - 2:30, a time when they don't have a lot of business. The parish again supported a local business and customers would see the people gather each week, hear the music, see them read Scripture (and perhaps wonder just a little bit about what that group was doing).

Two women in the evening session weren't regular church attenders. One recent RCIA neophyte who had been thirsting for new opportunities participated. She brought her husband who had never participated in any program, but was a faithful Mass attendee. He didn't say more than twenty words in the twelve weeks, but he was always there and signed up to participate in the future program, The Journey.

The Laidback Book Club

Women of all ages from the parish as well as relatives of parishioners who live in other towns joined the Facebook Group where they shared thoughts and favorite reflections from the book, *I've Been Thinking*.

The group was primarily composed of women in their mid-30's to early 50's who aren't generally involved in programming at the parish, but who really enjoyed the "laidback" format with no guilt if they got behind in the reading or didn't have anything to share.

There were also many other women who read along with the group, but didn't join the Facebook group. This first fall offering went so well that a new Laidback Book Club for men and women we offered in February with the book, *Tattoos on the Heart*. There was a Facebook discussion group as well as a face-to-face gathered time for discussion in mid-March.

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Theology by the Glass

Wednesday, November 14, saw their first “Theology by the Glass” gathering at a local winery in downtown Midland. Many other parishes, offering something similar, have met in a local brewery; since Midland’s local brewery didn’t have a space conducive to small group sharing, their local winery, “Grape Beginnings,” opened their doors to them once a month. Lyn remarked, “It was wonderful to be able to support this local business as they don’t get twenty-three patrons on a Friday evening let alone on a Wednesday night.”

“Grape Beginnings” seemed so appropriate since the hopes for this offering were that this gathering would be a “Great Beginning.” Twenty-three people (from 24 to 80 years of age) participated in this new beginning to their gratitude for their experiences of the presence of God in their daily lives. Those gathered were married, widowed, single; Catholic and non-Catholic friends. Cody, the youngest, had just moved to town three weeks previously and Pete, the senior member, has been a parishioner for over 50 years.

Lyn reflects: “As we got to know each other over our glasses of wine there were several amazing things that happened:

- We were so wowed that Cody was brave enough to show up, and as the Spirit would have it, six members of our ecumenical young adult group were also in attendance. Since their group meets on Thursdays, they were able to introduce themselves and give him a personal invitation to join them the very next night.
- There were two women who had been on the same Christ Renews His Parish team in 1996, but hadn’t seen each other in years. They reconnected with hugs and laughs and caught up on how their families were doing.
- We had just received word that Ruth, a junior in high school and active member of our youth programs, had been diagnosed with cancer at the Mayo Clinic that day. As her church family, we prayed for her right there in the middle of the winery.
- Four women who have daughters and sons between high school and young adult ages came separately but spent significant time at the end of the evening getting to know each other and sharing parenting stories. One woman shared how one of her sons, a high school

sophomore, had gotten on her last nerve that evening and she said, “Jack, I’ve got to go. I need a little God and wine.” (We considered renaming the evenings God and Wine.)

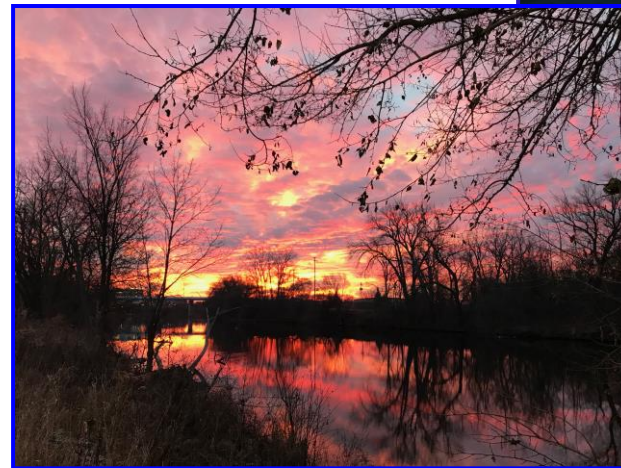
If only one of those things had happened that evening it would have been a total win, but it was really more than I could have dreamed of it to be, but isn’t that the way of God... more than our imagining.”

Sacred in the Secular

During Advent people were asked to take photos of how they experienced the presence of God during those four weeks. There were many pictures of Advent wreaths, manger scenes, and enthusiastic children.

Two others included:

During the Liturgy of the Word for children, the children point out the window at the sky during the 5 pm Mass on Gaudete Sunday after one little girl couldn’t contain herself and said, “Look, the sky is the color of Advent!”



A marvelous picture of God’s creation during an evening in Midland

The Journey

A six-week study to encounter Jesus on THE JOURNEY attracted 110 people – meeting on various days in various settings. Some small groups who had been meeting for years chose to do The Journey for these six weeks. Three new in-home small groups formed and two new groups met at the parish center. Sixty-five people signed up to participate in a large group format with small group table leaders.

Lyn remarked: “The wonder of this to me is that we have 110 people signed up and we haven’t stopped offering any of our other programs. I know that when many parishes run new programming they stop everything else to get lots of people involved, but we have intentionally chosen not to do this. What we have found is that people are hungry for interaction, community and belonging and they can fit six ninety-minute sessions into their lives. Again we had people in all age categories participating from the 30’s to the 80’s. One high school senior ran a Journey group during Lent for her peers.”

Pop-Up Small Groups

During Lent people were invited to participate in Pop-Up small faith groups to share their faith and discuss what it means to be Catholic today, why we do what we do and believe what we believe. These self-directed small groups included time for prayer, Scripture, readings and conversation questions.

Small groups popped-up in several places, at many times: in between the two Sunday morning liturgies (during elementary faith formation), during Sunday night youth ministry, on Monday evenings when the high school Outreach and Youth to Youth Retreat Teams meet, before Thursday morning school Mass, and on Tuesday evening. Because the readings and the format were the same for each group, people could also pop in to another group if they couldn’t make their original one.

GEMS Wonderings

- This parish is not your parish. What could this mean for you? What appeals to you about this approach?
- Is there a theme around which all your offerings could be built?
- Was there one single idea that might enhance one of your programs/processes?



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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>
- Lifelong Faith Training: <https://www.lifelongfaithtraining.com/>
- Lifelong Faith: <https://www.lifelongfaith.com/>
- Lifelong Faith Studio: <https://www.lifelongfaithstudio.com/>
- Seasons of Adult Faith website: <https://www.seasonsofadultfaith.com>
- The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation:
 - <https://www.lifelongfaith.com/books.html>
 - https://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/seasons_of_faith_journal_special_issue.pdf