



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

175 - October 1, 2022

A Best Practice: Parish Advent Workshop (Part II)

Advent is often a prime time to invite families – and all parishioners and people in the neighborhood - to come together at the parish for preparation, for prayer, study and reflection on this holy season. There are many themes, activities and ideas for exploration that could be offered by parishes.

The September 1st issue of **GEMS** began to share an event from one parish, Resurrection Parish, Canton, MI. This issue continues to give an overview of the explanations and directions which were found in the participants' booklet for each of the ten stations.

Emmanuel Comes into the Darkness (All ages)

Gather around the fire pit. Notice the darkness all around you and how the fire shines brightly in the darkness. Advent occurs in the darkest season of the calendar year to remind us that the Light of the World can overcome any darkness.

Over 500 years before Jesus' birth, the prophet Isaiah told us:

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Upon those who dwell in the land of gloom a light has shown. (Isaiah 9:1)



Reflection for older children and adults:

- What areas of your life feel gloomy and filled with darkness?
- Are there things that feel heavy and overwhelm you?

Write those areas of “darkness” on the card provided. Prayerfully reflect on the following passage:

I will lead the blind on their journey, on paths unknown I will lead them. I will turn darkness into light before them and make their crooked ways straight. These things I will do for them. I will not forsake them. (Isaiah 42:16)

How might God want to speak into your darkness? Consider trusting God with the dark areas of your life by throwing your card into the fire and watching the Light consume it.

Lord, we trust you with our darkness.

A Season of Waiting (4th grade – Adult)

Patience isn't part of our culture. Efficiency and instant gratification are our expectations. When you hear the word “wait” what comes to mind? Keep your eyes on the clock and watch the seconds go by. Does time move fast or slow? Sit quietly and wait for two minutes.

How do you feel? Relaxed? Frustrated?

Throughout Scripture we see God's people waiting: Abraham and Sarah, the Israelites in the desert, Mary awaiting Jesus' birth. Advent is all about patience and waiting, but waiting with a promise. When Mary received the news of her unexpected pregnancy, Luke tells us, “Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart.” (Luke 2:19) Those nine months must have been life changing.

Spend some time talking to God and journal your thoughts:

- What is God asking you to wait for this Advent?
- What might God be saying to you in the waiting?

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- What is God's promise to you that you can treasure and ponder?

In this season of Advent, we draw strength from all those who have waited before us. We look forward to the promises being nurtured within us.

The Gift You Desire (4th grade – Adult)

Take about three minutes to reflect on the video about the Advent gifts of hope, love, joy and peace.

<https://www.sermonspice.com/product/49664/advent>

- Which of these gifts are you experiencing now?
- Which of these gifts do you feel like you need more of in your life?
- Why do you feel drawn to that gift?
- Which of these gifts do you feel most called to share with others?



Write your reflections below and ask God to fill you with your desire: hope, love, joy or peace.

Every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no alteration or shadow. (James 1:17)

Choose the symbol – from one of the four baskets – for your desired gift and hang it on your Christmas tree as a reminder that God wants you to have this gift during Advent and throughout the year.



A Fresh Start for the Season (4th grade – Adult)

December 1st marks the end of one liturgical year in the church and the beginning of a new year. The start of a new year can be a good time to prayerfully reflect on making a fresh start.

- Are there attitudes, habits or patterns of sin that I would like to leave behind as I start this new year?
- What things are interfering with God's light shining more brightly in me?
- Where do I need God's forgiveness and grace?

Spend some time reflecting and journaling on these questions below.

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Consider celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation with Fr. Tom in the confessional or pray with Deacon Paul by the altar.



Making a List: Prioritizing Values (Teens and Adults)

Holidays can feel overwhelming because of all the extra activities that are crammed into our already hectic lives. These are often very “good” things: parties, baking, shopping, decorating, special performances, etc. but the net effect of all these “good” things is emotional, physical, and spiritual exhaustion.

What if you started with the end in mind so you could better prioritize your activities? Invite God to help you imagine that it is January 2nd and you are emotionally, physically and spiritually refreshed.

How could you make decisions this Advent with that goal in mind? What are your greatest values for this Advent?

- Is it times of rich connection as a family?
- Maintaining physical health?
- Keeping your budget on track?
- Creating great memories?

- Keeping the focus on God?

Spend some time prayerfully reflecting below on your goals for this season:

Now think of the activities that often fill your holidays.

- Do they ultimately support your values or diminish them?
- Are there activities you need to let go of or modify so you can live into your values?
- What changes might God be leading you to make this year?

(For instance, you love to buy presents but you tend to destroy your budget every year. Your schedule is often filled with shows and parties but they don’t always build connections and you often feel more drained. You do a cookie exchange but you desire to eat more healthily this year. This doesn’t mean you can’t have a cookie in the house, but perhaps you find ways to honor your values and still have fun this season.)

Talk to God and prayerfully list the activities that will support your values:

Use the 3x5 card provided to write down your values for this season. Place them in the Christmas Present in the front of the church as you ask Jesus to help you live out these priorities this year.

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Journeying Toward God (All ages)

A prayer labyrinth is a tool to invite you on a journey toward God. It is not a maze so you don't have to worry about getting lost or stuck. Please remove your shoes near the entrance and take a few slow, deep breaths to settle your mind. Take your time as you wind toward the center. Imagine yourself drawing closer to God. Bring to him a question, a concern, or your prayers. Those walking at a faster pace may silently pass on the left. When you come to the center of the labyrinth, spend a few moments receiving whatever graces God may be offering you. As you slowly retrace your steps out of the labyrinth, be open to receive God's gifts: wisdom, strength, or maybe just silence peace.

I wait for you, O Lord, I lift up my soul to my God. Make known to me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior. (Psalm 25:1, 4, 5a)



A Spirit of Giving: Our Jesse Gift Tree (All ages)

At Resurrection Parish, we have a group of volunteers that set up this tree in the Gathering Space every year at Advent. They decorate this tree with tags labeled with gifts needed for actual individuals, from our surrounding communities, who are in need right now. This year we are working with The Salvation Army and the Pope Francis Center. You are invited to purchase the items listed on the tags. You can then bring the items to the church, unwrapped and with the tag, and place them by the tree. This is an easy and practical way to help others.



Tonight, we invite you to reflect and pray about who you, each one of you, could help this Advent season. No matter how young or old we are, how much money we have or don't have, each and every one of us can do something for someone in need.

Prayerfully decide as a family whom to choose and allow family members to help pick out these items. This can be an invitation to understand just how fortunate we are, help us share God's love with others, and be a good family Advent activity.

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Mary was a young unwed teenager when she was told by an angel that she would become Jesus' mother. Rather than think of herself, her response was to travel to a relative who needed some extra help she stayed with Elizabeth until Elizabeth's baby was born. Mary didn't travel to a homeless center, but she did reach out to someone in need. This is something that each one of us can do as well, as an individual, as a couple, and as a family. Everyone knows someone that can use some help, especially as they are getting ready for Christmas. This, along with the opportunity to help real people in our community through the Jesse Tree project, can set a tone for your Advent this year.

Take some quiet time in prayer, right here and now, and ask God to show you who you can help. Write down your inspirations in this booklet.

Children: Use the ornaments provided and write down people in your family, school, team, etc. who you can pray for and help this Advent. Take your ornament home as a reminder.

The Closing Session

At the conclusion of the evening, everyone gathered again in church where they were reminded of the themes of Advent and encouraged to keep an Advent of prayer and service.

Father blessed the Advent Wreaths and ornaments that had been made that evening. The evening ended with the prayerful singing of Advent songs.



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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