



# GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

*from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study*

# 179 - December 2022

## A View from the Community: Today's Best Practices, Today's Challenges (Part IV)

A few years ago, [GEMS #103](#) (July 2019) wondered about the question: Are there consequences from not making adult faith formation a priority in our parishes?

Having received many grateful responses for that issue, I continued to wonder and ponder: are we really convinced of the primacy and necessity of faith formation for today's adults?

- What is the hopeful picture of adult faith formation in our parishes?
- Are there challenges still ahead of us?

Thus, immediately before Covid spread throughout the world, we began a series of issues exploring those questions. [GEMS #109](#) and [#110](#) were published.

- [#109](#) reflected on some signs of growth, some general best practices, in our ministry over the last several years.
- [#110](#) began an exploration of some continuing challenges for areas of development and progression which lie before us for the years ahead.

The third and fourth issues were not published at that time because issues about Covid took precedence. The third issue ([#177](#)) was sent last month. This issue continues a look at some of the continuing challenges (and exciting possibilities).



### Challenge 6: Formation for critical thinking

We live in a challenging, constantly-changing world. As Jane Regan said (“Adult Faith Formation: Will It Catch on this Time? *America*, September 22, 2003): “...adult faith formation invites the believing community to look beyond their own community to the wider mission of the church.”



### Challenge 7: Embracing the Digital World

Life is not the same as it was even ten years ago. It never will be again. Much of the change and way of life we experience today is because we are immersed in a digital world, even if we don't always recognize it.

Fortunately today, we have many helps and supports to aid us in navigating this world, especially for adult faith formation:

- Catholic Web Solutions (<http://www.catholicwebsolutions.com/>)

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- Catholic Tech Talk (<https://4lpi.com/blog/category/catholic-tech-talk/>)
- Catechesis 2.0 (<http://catechesis20.wordpress.com/web-2-0/>)
- [\*Click 2 Save: The Digital Ministry Bible\*](#) by Elizabeth Drescher and Keith Anderson
- [\*Tweet If You Love Jesus: Practicing Church in the Digital Reformation\*](#) by Elizabeth Drescher
- [\*The Word Made Fresh: Communicating Church and Faith Today\*](#) by Meredith Gould
- [\*Reaching Out in a Networked World: Expressing Your Congregation's Heart and Soul\*](#) by Lynne Baab
- [\*The Social Media Gospel\*](#) by Meredith Gould
- [\*The Parish Guide to Social Media\*](#) by Clarissa Valbuene Aljentera
- [\*Connected toward Communion: The Church and Social Communication in the Digital Age\*](#) by Daniella Zsupan-Jerome

These are only a few; resources abound.

The best practices studies often illustrate that the challenge is that parishes/(arch)dioceses are the last to embrace the potential of all that communications technology offers. Some best practices respondents said:

- “We aren’t very advanced in the world of technology ...”
- “We are just starting to use technology ...”
- “We could use some help in this area!”

Countless opportunities can be lost for connection, for hospitality, for formation if our parishes and (arch)dioceses are not active contributors and users of all that is possible.



## Challenge 8: The Challenges of the Digital World

As we just explored, our digital world is here to stay and has unimaginable potential for adult faith formation. The possibilities only multiply each day (as we witnessed during Covid).

At the same time, there can be consequences and implications which – in some instances – might be undesirable. Do we, can we, as church walk with people, serving as a balancing influence, helping people consciously navigate this new world, rather than be controlled by it?

In 1966 Martin Heidegger remarked that thoughtlessness is an uncanny guest who comes and goes everywhere in today’s world (*Discourse on Thinking*, translated by John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund. Harper and Row, 1966). If that was true in 1966, how much more so today!

A few of the characteristics and ramifications of today’s instant, digital world might be:

- We have access to much information; yet, information and knowledge are not the same as wisdom.
- With so much available to us, do we keep searching for more and more or do we also take time for reflection, for assimilation?
- Is speed affecting our decisions? The crush of technology often forces us to respond immediately. Do we blink when we need to think? E-mail, texting, social media and 24-hour news are relentless. Our time cycle gets faster every day. Do we take the time to step back and think about the big picture?

The wisdom of our traditions provides a life-style and spiritual practices which empower people to live in this digital world, maximizing its potential as well as coping with some of the undesired consequences.

How much do we accentuate these advantageous practices for and with our people within all of our adult faith formation opportunities, within all of church life:

- Time for reflection and meditation
- The restorative powers of Sabbath time

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- The call to live simply – and slowly
- Significant time and opportunities for sacred conversations
- Reminders and methods for living in the present moment

## Where We Are Today

Recall, if you can, life in our parishes and (arch)dioceses thirty, forty (or more) years ago. What was the “state of adult faith formation?” Taking a look back illustrates how far we’ve come. As disciples, as leaders, we know we want to continue striving for more. The needs of today’s people, today’s church, today’s world demands it.

The commitment of each one of us is echoed in the conclusion of *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us: A Pastoral Plan for Adult Faith Formation in the United States*:

“...we move ahead full of hope,  
knowing this vision of adult faith formation can become reality.

Jesus the Risen One is still with us,  
meeting us on the pathways of our lives,  
sharing our concerns,  
enlightening us with his word,  
strengthening us with his presence,  
nourishing us in the breaking of the bread,  
and sending us forth to be his witnesses. ...

Let us do our part with creativity and vigor,  
our hearts aflame with love  
to empower adults to know and live the message of Jesus.  
This is the Lord’s work.”

## GEMS Suggestion

- Give yourself the gift of *Lectio Divina* with the above passage from *Our Hearts Were Burning within Us*.
  - What is this passage saying to you today?
  - Is it saying something about where you need to place your energy?



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>
- 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\\_aff\\_-\\_journal\\_special\\_issue.pdf](https://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/seasons_of_aff_-_journal_special_issue.pdf)