



# GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

*from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study*

#181 - January 2023

## Quotes Worth Thinking About: Insights that Spark Reflections on Adult Faith Formation

This issue provides some reflection for our coming new year of 2023. Looking at various thoughts and insights from recent books, articles and blogs, we wonder: what does this say about the ministry of adult faith formation today?

These quotes – from numerous sources – are grouped into two categories:

- Some Foundational Insights
- A Few Practical Suggestions

Take time to ponder, to share ideas with your colleagues and adult faith formation committees, to incorporate new practices into your adult faith formation efforts. Enjoy.

### Some Foundational Insights

“Social scientists tell us that when we **change a habit or follow a dream** we go through five stages:

- Pre-contemplation, when we don’t even know we need or want to change
- Contemplation, when we say to ourselves, ‘someday I’ll do that’
- Preparation, when we are getting ready to do it ‘soon’
- Action, as in ‘I’m starting right now’
- Maintenance, which we means we keep going until we get where we want and stay there...”

- *This Year I Will ... How to Finally Change a Habit, Keep a Resolution, or Make a Dream Come True* by M. J. Ryan  
(Broadway Books, 2006)

### GEMS Wonderings

- Does every adult faith formation opportunity answer the “so what” question: what does this have to do with my everyday life? What am I going to do about it?

- How do we help people go through these five changes, so they are continually changing, growing, converting?



“The purpose of all education is to **expand our consciousness** – to lift us and enlarge how we see – so we can return and make use of what we learn in the days we have on Earth.”

- *The One Life We’re Given: Finding the Wisdom that Waits in Your Heart* by Mark Nepo (Atria, 2016)

### GEMS Wondering

- Often people might come to adult faith formation opportunities with their insights, opinions and feelings. How do we affirm those, build on those, and nudge people to enlarge their vision?



“Religion’s job is purely and simply one thing: to tell us, and keep reminding us of who we objectively are. Thus, Catholics keep eating ‘the Body of Christ’ until they *know* that **they are what they eat.**”

- *Immortal Diamond: The Search for our True Self*  
by Richard Rohr (Jossey-Bass, 2013)

### GEMS Wondering

- Are our formative processes always linked back to the reality of the Eucharist: that we are the Body of Christ?

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“When...Christ’s followers came out freely into the open after so many years, they noticed many people who applauded them and maybe a few who had previously shaken their fists at them. What they didn’t notice, however, was that the trees all around them were full of Zacchaeuses – those who were unwilling or unable to join the throng of old or brand new believers, but were neither indifferent nor hostile to them. Those Zacchaeuses were **curious seekers**, but at the same time they wanted to maintain a certain distance.

- *Patience with God: The Story of Zacchaeus Continuing in Us* by Tomas Halik (Doubleday, 2009)

“A similar challenge now faces religion in the Western world: as church attendance drops, we tend to notice those loud voices of secularization and those bright spots within our existing religious structures. But Jesus suggests that we notice the Zacchaeuses, those who would be interested in engaging us if we just learned to speak their names. Zacchaeuses are not limited to the ‘nones’ or the ‘spiritual but not religious.’”

- *Spiritual Friendship: Walking with People while the Rules are Changing* by Joseph A. Stewart-Sicking (Morehouse Publishing, 2016)

## GEMS Wonderings

- Who are the Zacchaeuses in our parish?
- How have we noticed them?



“One of the 2014 Synod on the Family participants, Cardinal Reinhard Marx, spoke toward the end of the synod stating that church doctrine ‘doesn’t depend on the spirit of time but can develop over time. The core of the Catholic church remains the Gospel, but have we discovered everything?’ ...

We come to a fuller understanding of our faith with time, experience, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.”

- *God Is Not Fair and Other Reasons for Gratitude*  
by Daniel P. Horan, OFM (Franciscan Media, 2016)

## GEMS Wonderings

- Do our adult faith formation offerings – rooted in the Gospel and our rich tradition – invite learners to go deeper, to discover new understandings for today’s questions?
- How do we provide time for learners to come to deeper understandings?
- How do we invite learners to new experiences rather than just facts and knowledge?



## A Few Practical Suggestions

“Audiences **check out after 10 minutes**, but you can keep grabbing them back by telling narratives or creating events rich in emotion.”

-*Brain Rules: 12 Principles for Surviving and Thriving at Work, Home and School* by John Medina (Pear Press, 2008)

## GEMS Wonderings

- As we reflect on our times of “lectures,” how do we invite people back every ten minutes?

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“Problem: Everyone seems to agree that we need to change, but **nothing’s happening.**

Advice:

1. Remember, what looks like resistance is often lack of clarity.
2. Are there obstacles to change that you can remove?
3. Can you find a bright spot that can serve as a model for the right behavior?”

- *Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard* by Chip Heath & Dan Heath. (Thorndike Press, 2010)

## GEMS Wonderings

- What change are we trying to encourage?
- Have we been clear about it?
- Have we checked with others to see if it really is clear to them?
- What are some of the obstacles within our parish, within our thinking, within parishioners’ thinking?
- Even though each person, each parish is unique, do we learn from others? Do we know of, emulate and share the bright spots of others?



“Amazon, like most organizations, has lots of meetings. But at the important ones, alongside the chairs in which his executives, marketing mavens, and software jockeys take their places, Bezos (the founder of Amazon) includes one more chair that remains empty. It’s there to remind those assembled who’s really **the most important person** in the room: the customer.”

- *To Sell is Human: The Surprising Truth about Moving Others* by Daniel H. Pink (Riverhead Books, 2012)

## GEMS Wonderings

- How do we plan? For our needs? For what’s convenient for our schedules?
- When was the last time we really discerned the needs of today for our parishioners?



“Creating Space for Questions. We can respond to young adults’ developmental needs by becoming **a place where they feel safe** to be themselves: anxious about the future, conflicted (or not) about their sex lives, doubtful about the historical doctrines of the church, etc. They need to be encouraged to own their faith, to make it real and concrete in their lives. The motto of the catechumenate program at Christ Church Cathedral in Indianapolis is, “Your questions are not in the way – your questions are the way.” Communities that are successfully reaching young adults emphasize authenticity.

The lens of authenticity is helping many young adult ministers find success by gathering around food and drink, such as pub theology and dinner churches. It’s wrong to think of these approaches as merely luring in young adults promises of food and booze. It’s about meeting them where they

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already are, trusting in Christ's presence among any gathering of the faithful and the seeking, easing barriers to invitation, and acknowledging that the faith questions you'd ask in a pub or at a dinner table are just as legitimate as the ones you'd ask in a pastor's office or parish hall."

- <https://buildfaith.org/faith-formation-young-adults/>

## GEMS Wonderings

- Do our young adults view our parish as a safe space to ask questions?
- Are young adults involved in the planning of events for young adults?
- Do any of these thoughts also apply to other age groups of adults?



"Being creative doesn't necessarily mean using new technology. Sweetser's *Parish Evaluation Project* highlights a pastor who added a question-and-answer period during the liturgy. Once a month the pastor picks a previously submitted question and gives a two-minute answer - enforced by a timer - during Mass. Afterward parishioners can further discuss the issue over coffee and doughnuts."

- <http://www.uscatholic.org/articles/201402/five-habits-highly-effective-parishes-28521>

## GEMS Wonderings

- Technology is important, but it isn't the only answer. What are you doing/could you do for ongoing adult faith formation that doesn't need technology?
- How do you reach out to your parishioners who don't have access to technology?



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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\\_faith\\_journal\\_special\\_issue.pdf](https://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/seasons_of_faith_journal_special_issue.pdf)