



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

#193 - July 1, 2023

After the Pandemic: What Have We Learned? Where do We Go? (Part II)

Some people would say that we're not beyond the pandemic stage of Covid. Hopefully, we're beyond – and will never return to – the days of 2020.

Other people might say: why are we still talking about this? We've already returned to the way it was before 2020.

In reality, often we don't realize what we've learned until there's a significant separation from the experience. Therefore, it's not too late to reflect on our experiences during the pandemic, always asking:

- What happened? Why did it happen like that?
- What did we learn?
- When does it tell us about going forward?

Last month we looked at two questions:

- What did you learn/experience (about adults, their growth in faith and need for belonging) during the time of Covid that needs to continue? That needs to change?
- What adult faith formation opportunity/process/procedure/program continued during the pandemic – or was begun – that was helpful for people/successful?

In this issue, we'll hear some (of the many) responses to two more questions:

- What adult faith formation do you dream of for the future?
- If you had one piece of advice for other adult faith formation leaders, what would it be?

“Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says:
‘We have always done it this way.’
I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities.
A proposal of goals without an adequate communal search for the means of achieving them will inevitably prove illusory.

~ *The Joy of the Gospel (Evangelii Gaudium)*

What adult faith formation do you dream of for the future?

As you read the dreams below, what would happen in your parish/(arch)diocese if you had a similar dream?

What were your dreams when we started to return to life without Covid restrictions?

What are your dreams now?

- I have thought of letter writing in response to "what new faith questions have arisen during the COVID experience?" I have also thought of collecting wisdom - what have you learned about life, family, yourself, work, faith, etc. - Gifts of the Wise Women, Wise Men. (*Mary Lou Putrow, OP, St. Clair Shores, MI*)

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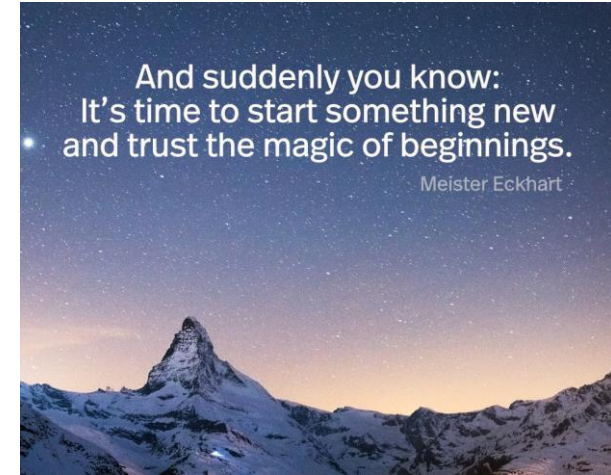
- Take advantage of this time to address the pivotal questions: Where is God in this? Why do good people suffer?
- Continue to help people to grieve – not only their losses but connect them with the great loss that often we’ve ignored. Have we become numb to the numbers of precious people who have died during the pandemic?
- I think we need to find ways to weave together the old and the new. Our brick and mortar buildings still stand and wait for our return, and that will be good. While virtual worship and socializing has been an alternative during the pandemic, it can’t replace the reality that we need to gather together and worship together in real time, participating in various ways, not as spectators but as family at the table.

There are ways to continue to worship online, when circumstances do not permit people to gather in person, and that should always remain an option, especially for the home-bound or the sick.

When it comes to opportunities for learning and faith sharing, the same is true. We need to find ways to combine virtual and in-person gatherings so that we can be inclusive and inviting.

I can imagine having a combination of online meetings and in-person as a hybrid approach to programming. Certainly, every parish that didn’t have a digital production ministry in the past needs to seriously consider initiating one now.

Covid taught us that if we just focus on “in-person or face-to-face gathering,” we are missing a portion of our population who can’t attend in person. *(Nancy Mason Bordley, Troy, MI)*



If you had one piece of advice for other adult faith formation leaders, what would it be?

- Be open to last minute changes. Be sensitive to those that are truly struggling with all that we are facing, be it pandemic, politics and so on. The advice I give to all of my adults and really anyone who are involved in ministries in the parish: We need to meet people where they are at in their faith journey. NOT where we think they should be. *(Sherrie Clutts, St. Patrick Catholic Church, Traverse City, MI)*
- Find a way to use Zoom to keep parishioners connected, even after the live sessions resume. *(Anne Hobbein, Immaculate Conception Parish, Elmhurst, IL)*
- Offer playlists – of various opportunities – people choose what they want to do when they want to do. *(Catzel LaVecchia, Church of the Presentation, Upper Saddle River, NJ)*

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- Might we be called – in adult faith formation – to help people be more comfortable with technology? More and more things are online, e.g. health insurance, Social Security information, etc.
<https://www.getsetup.io/series/refresh-my-technology-skills>
- We need to be flexible and creative. We need to remember that if we want everyone to feel invited and to consider participating, we have to help that happen by providing options for people. In other words, if your scripture study is held on a Wednesday morning in January and snow is predicted, you might need to consider turning the session into a zoom or Skype gathering so that people can still participate from home. The same is true for family faith formation. Programs can be set up to combine home work, remote learning and in person gathering for projects, worship and socializing. I think that the days of going back to weekly meetings in classrooms are gone. (*Nancy Mason Bordley, Troy, MI*)
- Get comfortable with technology! Don't rely on "the way we've always done things." Be creative! Allow the Holy Spirit to free your mind, heart, and expectations to open your imagination to possibilities. Tap into the wisdom of parishioners and participants. Ask "What would you like to see/do?" "What excites you, encourages you, sustains you?" "With what do you struggle?" "What makes you happy or sad?" Get their feedback on what they would like to do and participate in, then invite them into the planning process. (*Teri Burns, St. Robert of Newminster Church, Ada, MI*)
- We don't have to create everything. There are wonderful resources available to us today. Curate! Curate! Curate!
<https://www.seasonsofadultfaith.com/>
- Learn what worked for you during the pandemic and why and be very careful about abandoning techniques and modes of delivery and interaction that seemed to work...as they may have nothing to do with the pandemic per se, the pandemic may have just revealed new opportunities for us. The new technologies we were forced onto

should become standards tools for us to use going forward in a way that can enhance, expand and build upon the physical presence once re-established. (*Deacon Michael Ward, Saint Josephine Bakhita Parish, Rocky Hill, CT*)



- I think everyone has learned the importance of providing a variety of ways for people to access information. Going forward, it will be essential to remain flexible and adapt to people's needs via live-stream and/or recorded formats. Going forward, people will expect to be able to connect to parent meetings and sacramental preparation with online options, as well as in-person. One thing that I heard mentioned numerous times is that we always thought online ministry would be too impersonal, yet discovered that people seemed to open up more easily and share deeply - perhaps because they were in the comfort of their own homes and felt safe. (*Therese Carroll-Caruso, Louisville, KY*)
- In the book, *Full Spectrum Thinking*, Bob Johanson refers to the acronym VUCA which has been around since 1987, a trendy term used in the business world to say "Hey, it's really crazy out there!" It's used to name the craziness and help business leaders put a plan together to counteract the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world they live in.

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Johansen puts a more optimistic twist on the concept. He names the four negative things VUCA represents and then names four positive VUCA opposites that are needed to alleviate some of the craziness:

- Negative VUCA: Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous
- Positive VUCA: Vision, Understanding, Clarity, Agility

How might we, then, envision faith formation today?

- Vision: Step back and re-discover the essential reasons for each faith-forming program. What is its purpose? What kind of growth and knowledge are desired and needed in today's world?
- Understanding: Develop a real-time understanding of the hopes and realities of the adults in our parishes as well as in the community. Likewise, develop an understanding of how faith is formed today.
- Clarity: Having a vision and deepened understanding, how will we move toward to new places? A clarity of purpose is a guiding force as each parish emerges into a "new normal."
- Agility: Agility will bring newly formed or re-purposed programs to life.



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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