



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

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A Best Practice: Remembering our Deceased Loved Ones

Our Hearts Were Burning within Us (U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter on Adult Faith Formation) reminds us that, "Ongoing faith formation can be accomplished through a great variety of forms: systematic and occasional, individual and community, organized and spontaneous. Learn to see and take advantage of every opportunity to help adults appreciate and grow in their faith. The following five approaches can be used in some way in any Catholic community, and are to be adapted as appropriate to parish size and need:

- Liturgy
- Family- or Home-Centered Activities
- Small Groups
- Large Groups
- Individual Activities" (#99-110)

As the document talks about liturgy, it says, "Each aspect of worship—the homily, the physical environment, hospitality, liturgical ministries, congregational participation, appropriate music, the Sunday bulletin with inclusions—has the potential to foster adult faith, bringing people into a more intimate relationship with Christ and with one another." (#101)

This is certainly true of Sunday liturgy. We also witness and experience this fostering of faith through liturgy in various other times of Eucharistic celebration. Probably one prime example is how parishes today celebrate the feast of All Souls on November 2nd.

This issue gives brief summaries of what several parishes have planned and celebrated on All Souls' Day during the past few years.



Kathie Amidei, Pastoral Associate at **St. Anthony on the Lake, Pewaukee WI** relates their experience of inviting the families of anyone whose funeral of their loved ones were celebrated at the parish in the past year.

Following the gospel reading of a grain of wheat that falls and dies and then produces many seeds, Kathie and the pastor, Fr. Tony Zimmer, invited a dialogue homily.

They asked the families, "What has been the fruit or blessings from their loss and grief?" Kathie shares, "Their responses were heartfelt and touching: the support they received from others, the strength they experienced from their loved one before they died, empathy, seeing their children so caring for grandparents and the love from family members, the grace of anointing of the sick... their responses showed such courage and resilience."

Following the reflection of their experiences, Fr. Tony and Kathie shared the fruits and blessings they received from ministering to them. Fr. Tony talked about ritual and Kathie spoke about the witness of love and hope she witnessed in walking through their loss with them and their willingness to move forward in hope.

Kathie shares her reflection on the liturgy: "I think it is one of the best personal and communal healing experiences a parish can offer. One thing that has made it special is that people are personally invited who have had their loved one's funeral at the parish.

We used to invite anyone who had experienced a death but that got to be so large and impersonal. The fact that we journeyed together with each of these families makes it so intimate. And I think there is such power when they are together. Grief can be so isolating. When they see all the other families, I think they have a sense that "grief shared" is softened.

We celebrate this liturgy a day or two after All Souls Day. On All Souls Day we do have an acknowledgement during the liturgy of anyone who has lost a loved one at any time.

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At **Our Lady of the Lake Parish, Euclid, Ohio**, during the Eucharistic prayer of the November 2nd liturgy, the presider and music director chant the names (alternating with every five names) of all those who have died in the last year, including parishioners, family, friends and other names which are submitted by parishioners.

Memorial votive candles (5-day or 7-day candles in glass containers) with a label with a space for the name of their loved one are offered to all who come to the liturgy. The family adds the name; then the candles are lit and placed on a window ledge near their pew. Families take the candles home with them that evening after Mass.



During the month of November, the Memorial Book is on display near the baptismal font. Those who choose to do so are invited to bring a framed photo of their loved one, which are then displayed on a table in the church for the month.



At the conclusion of each funeral liturgy throughout the year at **St. Margaret of Scotland Parish, St. Clair Shores, MI**, the family places a cross on the back wall of the church in memory of their loved one.

During the November 2nd liturgy, each name is prayerfully mentioned (and shown on the screen) as a candle is lit. The families then receive the candle and the cross which has been displayed in the church throughout the past year.



At **St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Cumberland, MD**, they place a large container filled with sand in front of the baptismal font. As the hymn "For All the Saints" is being played, people are invited to come forward, light from a candle that was lit from the baptismal candle, and place it upright in the sand.

As names are read later during the prayers of the church, either the steeple bells or handbells ring.



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They also make copies of the [Remembering the Saints Milestone Moment](#) for them to use in their home or in a small group.

Throughout the year they gift this book to families with children: [Water Bugs and Dragonflies: Explaining death to children](#).

For All Souls Day at [Desert Cross Lutheran Church, Tempe, AZ](#), the congregation has a time where the names of those who have died in the last year are read. Then people pick up a white carnation in the back of the sanctuary and come forward to place it near the Christ Candle in remembrance of the deceased.

In preparation for the remembrance of Holy Souls, [Holy Trinity Parish in Comstock Park, MI](#) creates a banner listing all the names of those whose funeral was celebrated at the parish in the past year.

The families are invited to the Memorial Mass on November 2nd. They have name tags and a special section for them to sit together.

Following the liturgy, each family receives a gift bag with candles and a copy of Dedication of Five Candles to take home to use during their holiday gathering.



Dedication of Five Candles

A ritual for anytime of the year, but particularly around Holiday and/or Family Celebrations

As we light these five candles in honor of you. We light one for **our grief**, one for **our courage**, one for **our memories**, one for **our love**, and one for **our hope**.

- This candle is our light through **grief**. The pain of losing you is intense. It reminds us of the depth of our love for you.
- This candle represents our **courage**—to confront our sorrow, to comfort each other; and to change our lives.
- This candle is the light of **memories**: the times we laughed, the times we cried, the times we were angry with each other, the silly things you did, and the caring and joy you gave us.
- This candle is the **light of love**. Day by day we cherish the special place in our hearts that will always be reserved for you. We thank you for the gift your living brought to each of us.
- And this candle is the **light of hope**. It reminds us of the love and memories of you that are ours forever— and our assurance from Jesus Christ that we will see you again.

May the glow from the **flame of faith** be our source of hopefulness now and forever ~ WE LOVE YOU! Amen!

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As many other parishes, **St. George Parish, Baton Rouge, LA** sends letters to all those families who have lost someone during the last year, inviting them to take part in their All Souls Day liturgy. The names of the loved ones who have died are prayerfully read after communion and the families come to pick up a lit votive candle which is carried in the procession to the cemetery for the blessing of graves.



Two Resources

- The Adult Milestone titled, [Loss of a Loved One](#) includes a devotional guideline for three settings: the congregation, the home, and a follow-up for either congregation or home.
- A gifting stone that shows an [eye with a teardrop](#).

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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