



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

#78 - June 2017

A Best Practice: The Parish Bulletin as Adult Faith Formation

With today's escalation of communications technology, people frequently say that the weekly parish bulletin is dying (if not already dead).

A recent article at Vibrant Parish: Catholic Church Communications (<http://www.vibrantparish.us/blog/BUILDING-A-VIBRANT-PARISH-BLOG-FOR-YOUR-CATHOLIC-CHURCH/the-bulletin-is-not-dead>) recounts just the opposite:

“The communications challenge that we are facing as the Catholic Church, is not the message. The message hasn't changed for more than 2,000 years. The challenge is the means of communication. There are now 211 social media networks, most probably only use a handful or so, like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat, or LinkedIn. There is also email, text messages and push notifications...

I know what you are thinking. A bulletin publisher is telling you that the Catholic church bulletin is not dead. There is research to back up that claim. According to The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), 41% of all adults use their parish bulletin (either print or online) once a month or more while only 9% (12% of parents) use their parish website.... (<http://uploads.weconnect.com/mce/d9fce17200317431b1b43b27508224cf0294759a/CARA%20CatholicFamilyResearch.pdf>)

While some may say that the bulletin is dead, CARA's study clearly shows otherwise.”

“...bulletins are such an important tool for communication and evangelization. Parish bulletins reach more Catholics weekly than any other media vehicle in the archdiocese.”

- Cardinal Sean O'Malley
Boston, MA

Some foundational realities about the possibilities of using the parish bulletin for adult faith formation



The parish bulletin can be formative as well as informative.

Our Hearts Were Burning within Us reminds us that “the parish is the curriculum.” (#118). Everything that we do teaches; every activity and practice of parish life is formative.

As we plan for and publish our weekly parish bulletins, do we always ask ourselves on these questions:

- What is this information/announcement “teaching” people about our parish, about our faith?
- How could we add to/develop this information to provide a learning experience for our parishioners?
- What is currently happening within our neighborhood, our parish, our church, our world? Is there information and/or resources that we can provide to help parishioners more deeply understand, talk together and act?



Even photographs and graphics “teach.”

If – whenever the bulletin speaks about the Eucharistic liturgy – the graphic/photo we use is of the priest at the altar, is that subtly teaching people that liturgy is the work of the priest rather than the celebration of the whole community?

What types of graphics do we use for family events and family articles? Two parents and two children? Does that subtly “disinvite” the other families within the parish?



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The parish bulletin can teach in two ways: by what is included and by what is not included.

What might people learn if:

- Most of columns, pictures, information, etc. were done by and about the clergy and the parish staff rather than also including information and columns by and about the parishioners?
- There is frequent information about parish finances but few opportunities for outreach beyond the parish?



At times we might specifically connect parish activities with Scripture and/or the practices of our Catholic life.

For instance, might we point out how the parish is continually living the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy?

- Faith formation: instruct the ignorant
- Pastoral counseling: counsel the doubtful
- The bereavement ministry: comfort the sorrowful
- Parish food pantry: feed the hungry
- The ad for the local funeral home: bury the dead

Some Suggestions to Make Parish Bulletins Formative

- Provide a weekly faith sharing question flowing from the Sunday readings. Invited parishioners to discuss each week's question with their families (spouses or friends).
- Print in the bulletin a question that an RCIA inquirer asked and how the RCIA team answered it.

- Include a Question of the Week about Catholic faith, traditions and practices with a short, easy-to-understand answer. Encourage parishioners to submit questions they wonder about.
- Include a short quote (with a reflection question) from a current and pertinent church document or encyclical, such as Pope Francis' encyclical on care for our common home, *Laudato Si'*.
- Help parishioners to be formed in the mission and goals of the parish by including a weekly article from a different staff member or parishioner on how a particular goal was lived within the parish during the past month.
- Each week have a box at the bottom of page one to list the three websites of the week.
 - They might be general ones for Catholic information (e.g. Living the Catholic Faith in the Third Millennium: <http://www.ecatholicism.org/>).
 - They could be centered around a specific topic (determined by the time of year or a specific focus of the parish or church):
 - Marriage:
 - MarriageEncounter (<http://www.wme.org/>)
 - For Your Marriage (<http://www.foryourmarriage.org/>)
 - Retrouvaille (<http://retrouvaille.org/>)
 - Young Adults:
 - Busted Halo (<http://bustedhalo.com/>)
 - Catholics on Call (<http://www.catholicsoncall.org/>)
 - Any Given Sunday (<http://anygivensundayproject.org/>)

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- Simplicity:
 - Living Lightly (<http://www.susanvogt.net/blog/>)
 - Simple Living (<http://www.simpleliving.org/>)
 - 50 Ways to Challenge Over-Commercialism (<http://www.earthhealing.info/fifty.htm>)
- At the beginning of each liturgical season, explain the season, its celebrations and customs. Share ideas of things that can be done to observe the season 24/7. See [GEMS #60](#).
- Invite parishioners to write short reflections connecting their faith to everyday life. For instance:
 - My Favorite Scripture Passage
 - A Book that Has Helped Me this Year
 - My Favorite Quote
 - Where I Saw God This Week
 - Living the Stations of the Cross Today
 - Reflections on Today's Gospel
 - Reflections/Prayers for each Day of Advent/Christmas and Lent/Easter
 - Acts of Kindness/Generosity I Saw This Week
 - My Experience of the Easter Vigil (from neophytes, sponsors and parishioners)
- Use some of the ready-made resources for publishing. We do not have to invent the wheel. The content we need is accessible by subscription, donation, or through a good publishing service.
 - Bud Ozar, former director of the Office for Family Life, archdiocese of Detroit, has prepared short reflections connecting the Sunday Scripture readings to family life. They can be found at www.janetschaeffler.com. Click on "AFF Helps."
 - Prepare the Word: <https://preparetheword.com/121/publication/2198->
 - Sunday Website: <http://liturgy.slu.edu/>

- Parish Lenten Resources: <http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/Lent/parish-resources.htm>
- Marriage Moments and Parenting Pointers: www.MarriageMinistryMadeEasy.com
- Daily Reflections: <http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/daily.html>

Our bulletin "is now popular
across the generations.
One woman was surprised to hear her teenage
daughter say something 'almost profound' one night
at dinner. When she challenged her, the daughter
rolled her eyes and sighed,
'Mom, don't you read the bulletin?'"

- Fr. Jim Field

http://www.todaysparish.com/articles/communication/no_sub_ministry/2010/10-18/the-parish-bulletin-a-faith-formation-resource

Some Suggestions for Coordination of Communication

- Does your parish bulletin link to your parish website and other tools of social media?
- Are the opportunities provided in the parish bulletin (especially formative ones) also placed on the parish website?

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Examples of Parish Bulletins

- Inspiring Parish Bulletins:
 - <https://inspiredangela.wordpress.com/2014/08/02/inspiring-parish-bulletins-pt-1/>
 - <https://inspiredangela.wordpress.com/2014/08/10/inspiring-parish-bulletins-pt-2-connecting-with-the-web/>
- 15 Examples of Church bulletins:
<http://www.communicatejesus.com/15-examples-of-church-newsletters-and-bulletins/>

Some Suggestions for Bulletins

- 9 Smart Tips for Improving Your Church Bulletin:
<http://www.stevefogg.com/2015/03/03/tips-church-bulletin/>
- Bulletins and Stewardship:
<https://inspiredangela.wordpress.com/2014/08/24/inspiring-parish-bulletins-pt-4-bulletins-stewardship/>
- Bulletin Design Trends: How to Find Your Style:
<http://www.4lpi.com/2013/12/11/bulletin-design-trends-how-to-find-your-style/>
- 15 Lessons from 17 Different Church Bulletins:
<http://www.unseminary.com/15-lessons-from-17-different-church-bulletins/>
- Church bulletins: <https://www.pinterest.com/explore/church-bulletins/>
- The Parish Bulletin as a Faith Formation Resource:
http://www.todayparish.com/articles/communication/no_sub_mini_stry/2010/10-18/the-parish-bulletin-a-faith-formation-resource

- Improving Parish Communications – Parish Bulletins:
<http://www.ocadwpa.org/files/Parish%20Development/BulletinarticleContent.pdf>
- Church Bulletins: 20 Insights & 10 Great Examples:
(<http://www.churchmarketingsucks.com/2015/03/church-bulletins-insights-examples/>)

Some GEMS Wonderings

- Amid all the information here, what one or two things might be helpful/pertinent for you and your parish right now?
- Are there other people on your parish staff who might find this issue helpful?
- Are there things that your parish does extremely well that you would like to share? (Email jschaeffler@adriandominicans.org)



Adding New Luster to Older GEMS

[GEMS #51, #68 and #69](#) explored some ways of celebrating creation. You might want to continue your actions with:

- 50 ideas for making Laudato Si' a part of parish life:
<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/50-ideas-making-laudato-si-part-parish-life-christopher-cox>
- An idea for a creation trail to connect your parish with nature:
<http://www.buildfaith.org/2015/09/04/build-a-creation-trail-to-connect-your-church-or-school-with-nature/>

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[GEMS #64, #65 and #66](#) focused on ways parishes and (arch)dioceses can support grandparents – in all their various roles. Some additional ideas that might be helpful to share with grandparents:

- The 8 Best Things about Being Close with your Grandma: <http://www.simplemost.com/best-things-close-grandma/?partner=scripps&partner-sub=WXYZ&utm>
- Grandparents Give the Gift of Faith: <http://www.buildfaith.org/grandparents-give-gift-faith/>



Golden Nuggets from You

“After reading GEMS #62 on Cinquains, I decided to try the process with our RCIA participants. There are always many questions about salvation, a very complex issue when considering in RCIA there are many participants from different faith walks. Some believe “once saved, always saved” and others don’t have any idea what that phrase means. Some conversations on the subject can lead to much debate and heated argument and other conversations lead to absolutely nothing. I believe that our sessions work best when I plant the seed and let the groups talk independently. Frankly, the process was more important to me than the information being taught.

So I introduced the subject: “The act of redemption, the death and resurrection of Christ which offers forgiveness and restore our relationship with God, is only the beginning of the salvation process. We work through that process throughout our lives.

Over these past few weeks, we have discussed many Scripture passages about salvation and what they mean. As Catholics, we believe that we have been saved, that we are being saved, and that we will be saved. We cooperate with God’s grace to live the life God wants for us. Now I invite you to think about what salvation means to you personally.”

I then asked the following questions, giving the participants time to write their words and then to talk about their choices.

- What word comes to mind when I say ‘salvation?’
- Write two adjectives that describe ‘salvation.’
- What three action words describe how we ‘work out our salvation?’
- Write four words that describe how you feel about ‘salvation.’
- Write one word that refers to and sums up the first word.

After introducing this, they shared with one another what they had written. The discussions at the tables were lively.

What a great way to open up discussions on what can be very personal and emotional issues. Thanks, Sister Janet.”



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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>
- *The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation*
http://www.lifelongfaith.com/store/p25/The_Seasons_of_Adult_Faith_Formation.html
- *The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation website*
<http://www.lifelongfaith.com/2015-adult-faith-formation-symposium.html>