



# GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

*from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study*

#80 - August 2017

## A Best Practice: Soul Friends

Many parishes – or adults on their own – have formed small groups: faith-sharing groups, prayer groups, Scripture study groups, theological discussion groups, spiritual direction groups, etc. In this issue, we explore the journey and endeavors of one group from Our Lady of Fatima Parish (Schenectady, New York) and St. Helen's Church (Niskayuna, NY).

### The Invitation

Helen Moon, the director of adult faith formation at the two parishes, sensing her own need and the needs of others within the parish, invited people through the parish bulletin:

Soul Friends:

Would you like to discover how God is present in your everyday life?

Would you like to know yourself better?

Would you like to grow in awareness of God's plans and dreams for you?

A small group of 'seekers' is forming who would meet perhaps once a month to grow and share the 'God-seed' that is in each of us.

If you are interested, please come to a preliminary meeting on Monday, January 21, at 10 am in the library at Rosa Road church.

If you cannot make this meeting, but are interested please call or email.

Other times and days could be possible.

### The Beginning

The group began with about twelve interested people; over the years it has dwindled. Helen mentions that the small size "allows for quiet prayer and sharing and deep friendship."

The invitation is always there for others to join or to begin a new group. Helen comments: "With the outline and the agenda so clearly spelled out, I am hoping that someone can 'join' us and feel at home quite readily."

"Why do we need faith sharing groups?"

Catholics, lost in the size of today's modern parishes, still look for more significant ways to share their spiritual life and hopes.

Faith groups nourish this sense of belonging.

Our fast paced lives leave us little time to reflect on the meaning of life.

Faith groups give you a chance to slow down, recall the day or week in quiet time and listen to yourself and others.

- <http://www.mary.org/ministries-education/spirituality/faith-sharing-groups#.WGPsNVMrLX4>

### The Mission of Soul Friends

Soul Friends is a Spiritual Direction Group and a Theological Reflection Group:

A time to explore how God is present in our lives through prayer, faith-sharing, hopes and dream sharing . . . and daily living . . .

An invitation into your center . . .

A journey with and into the Mystery of God . . .

### Guidelines for Soul Friends

We hope that this group will give each person who attends

Mutual prayer support,

Opportunities to ask questions, share faith and/or uncertainties

A chance to grow together in our understanding of our experience of God's presence

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We pledge our support through friendship and prayer.  
We promise to keep all that is said here confidential and non-judgmental.  
We know that insights and comments are helpful at times,  
but advice is usually not.

We hope that all feel comfortable to share and to listen with compassion and respect.  
Everyone is encouraged to share, but no one is pressured to share.  
All are to be considerate of others by keeping their sharing to the allotted time.

Three other conditions are requested:

- Pray for others in the group between sessions.
- Be consistent in whatever practice seems best to reflect and honor your relationship with God at this time.
- Before coming to the group, spend time in prayer reflecting on God's presence in your everyday life.

## What This Group Is Not

- This group is not a 'self-help' support group . . .
- This group is not about psychological help or counseling . . .
- We are not gathering together to 'solve' each other's problems or to offer advice.
- We are here to pray, to share, to reflect theologically, spiritually -- *and* to listen . . .

In preparing for these sessions, Helen read a great deal about facilitating theological discussion or spiritual direction groups. It was often suggested that each person share followed by silence -- without any comments.

Helen goes on to say: "So this is what we first tried. Everyone was in agreement that they did not like this. They did not want 'advice' but they did want feedback, insights, comments; otherwise they felt disconnected. So we changed to having comments and sharing intermingled."

"God-in-you is listening to God-in-the-other."

- Margaret Silf in *Inner Compass*

## The Agenda for each Gathering of Soul Friends

When the group began, they used the book, *Inner Compass* by Margaret Silf (one chapter a month).

### Opening Prayer

- "Come Holy Spirit"
- The song, "By Name I Have Called You"
- A few minutes of quiet stillness and prayer centering ourselves in God's presence, being open to that loving presence NOW.

### Conversation

- Discussing and questioning what was read in *Inner Compass* or other spiritual reading that connects to the reflections. (15 minutes)

### Faith-Sharing

- How has God been in my life this month? week? day?  
At times, this sharing is no more than a sentence or two. It is up to each person, remembering that sharing is a gift given to each other, and so is listening. (30 minutes)

### Bringing Needs Before the Lord:

- Those who wish mention a need or desire to bring before the Lord.
- After each petition, the group prays silently for that petition for 15 seconds or so.

### Our action plan for the month:

- What do I plan to do this month to grow spiritually?
- As each person ponders this question, all pray in silence for a few minutes.

### Closing Prayer

- Prayer of Thomas Merton  
<http://discernmentresources.blogspot.com/2009/02/thomas-mertons-prayer-for-discernment.html>
- The song, "You Are Mine"

Time of fellowship follows for any who wish to stay.

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## What Some of the Participants Have Said

- Sharing Faith in this type of atmosphere makes it more, more a part of my everyday life.
- I find myself so much more focused on God's presence throughout my entire day, not just when I am in this group.
- When I am experiencing challenges or problems, I know that these companions, these soul friends, are praying for me. It is so reassuring.
- In sharing with these people how God seems to be in my life, I have begun to notice even more God moments/experiences as each day goes on.

There is an "African proverb: 'It is because one antelope will blow the dust from the other's eyes that the two antelopes walk together.'"

And so, through the interceding presence of the group, the dust is blown from our eyes. We see more clearly the presence of God in our lives."

- Rose Mary Dougherty in *Group Spiritual Direction*

## Some Resources about and For Small Faith-Sharing Groups

- *Group Spiritual Direction: Community for Discernment* by Rose Mary Dougherty, S.S.N.D.; Paulist Press.
- *An Open Place: The Ministry of Group Spiritual Direction* edited by Daniel Schrock and Marlene Kropf; Morehouse Publishing.
- *The Lived Experience of Group Spiritual Direction* edited by Rose Mary Dougherty, S.S.N.D.; Paulist Press.
- *Where Two or Three Are Gathered: Spiritual Direction for Small Groups* by Daniel L. Pretchel; Morehouse Publishing.

- Starting a Small Faith-Sharing Group:  
[http://www.votf.org/Voice\\_of\\_Renewal/FaithSharingGroups.pdf](http://www.votf.org/Voice_of_Renewal/FaithSharingGroups.pdf)
- Small Group Faith-Sharing Hints  
<http://salinadiocese.org/new-evangelization/2675-small-group-faith-sharing-hints>
- Tips for Faith-Sharing: <http://goodgroundpress.com/sbstips.aspx>
- Big Gifts Come in Small Prayer Groups:  
<http://www.uscatholic.org/church/2008/07/big-gifts-come-small-prayer-groups>
- Group Spiritual Direction: What Is It?  
<http://shalem.org/1995/01/01/group-spiritual-direction-what-is-it/>
- What Happens in Group Spiritual Direction?  
<http://www.smallgroups.com/articles/2009/what-happens-in-group-spiritual-direction.html?paging=off>
- Theological Reflection in a Small Group:  
<https://alban.org/archive/theological-reflection-in-a-small-group/>

## GEMS Wonderings

- As you read this issue, what part of this opportunity intrigued you?
- What has been your experience regarding the most helpful number of people for a faith-sharing group?
- This opportunity is based on a book. What other media might you use: YouTube videos, art (Visio Divina)?
- Are there groups in your parish that are under-targeted for an opportunity like this? For example: lawyers reflecting together about the ethical challenges which they face.



## Adding New Luster to an Older GEM

[GEMS #50](#) shared with us a parish that invited all their parishioners to prayer – in their homes, all at the same time. We have heard stories of how other parishes have adopted and used this process. Lisa Brown, parish catechetical leader at Christ the Redeemer Parish, Lake Orion, MI, shared how their parish invited everyone to prayer on the eve of the November 2016 election.

What other events (international, national, parish, world-wide church, etc.) liturgical seasons, reasons for thanks, intercessions, etc. might be occasions for inviting all to prayer in their homes?

You can view the prayer that was created by Christ the Redeemer Parish at [www.janetschaeffler.com](http://www.janetschaeffler.com) (AFF Helps): [Prayer at Home on Election Eve](#).



## Golden Nuggets from You

“Once again you have hit the nail on the head by suggesting that we move our focus from hospitality to invitation [GEMS #58](#).”

The offerings for adults at our parish include an amazing amount of hospitality ONCE THE PEOPLE GET HERE! We are friendly, inclusive, joyful, etc. but we seem to be getting the same people present at every offering.

We have been looking for ways to reach out to more adults to join us. We are a newly merged parish and are having a bit of a problem including members of all three former churches. We all know invitation is the key but we also admit that the approach is not an easy one. I am going to encourage our team to focus on personal invites to things that we are offering. Thanks for the great ideas!”

- Diane Seidel, St. Boniface Parish, Bay City, Michigan

“I have been passing [GEMS](#) around to everyone and [GEMS #66](#) is very interesting to me also because we are searching for a way to keep in touch with children, parents, grandparents from birth to five years old.”

- Gerry Fedor, Queen of the Universe Parish, Levittown, PA



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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>
- *The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation*  
[http://www.lifelongfaith.com/store/p25/The\\_Seasons\\_of\\_Adult\\_Faith\\_Formation.html](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>