



# GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

*from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study*

#92 - August 2018

## A Best Practice: Needs Assessment (Part II)

Last month we began exploration of building our adult faith formation efforts on the needs of our people.

One of the key principles that was mentioned in the previous issue is: Needs assessment is about more than asking adults about their needs (as important as that is). The key task of determining needs is to find out **who our parishioners are**, what is important to them, what their concerns, worries, hopes and dreams are. This information, then, can reveal a great deal about their deepest needs and expectations.

“We need to really know people as human beings.

We have to give all the opportunity to share their story, creating a relationship that goes beyond just waving to them at Mass.”

*Tom Zanzig*

Rather than jumping right into a “program menu,” our role, then, is to search the deeper, basic felt needs that might be met through additional faith formation and to develop new opportunities from your parish’s reality:

- Who are our parishioners?
- What are their concerns, worries, and hopes?
- What are some of their struggles – personal, family, work issues?

For this issue, then, let us look at our key task in discerning needs: knowing who our parishioners are.

### Getting to Know Our Parishioners

I recently did an internet search for “ways to get to know who your parishioners are.” Other than two from other denominations (which had a sentence or two about getting to know parishioners), all the other entries centered around:

- Getting to Know Your Fellow Parishioners
- Getting More People Involved
- Several Ways to Help People Get to Know your Parish

- 4 Easy Ways to Support Your Parish Staff
- 5 Sure-Fire Ways to Get Involved at your Catholic Church
- 6 Ways to Increase Giving in Your Church
- 7 Ways to Help Others Understand the Vision of the Parish

As important as each of these realities are, what is our starting point? As we reflect on the past issues of **GEMS** on hospitality ([GEMS #3-9](#); [#15-18](#); [#46-48](#); and [#56-58](#)), how do we welcome and extend warm hospitality to each and every parishioner?

Do we begin with affirming who they are? Welcoming them for who they are? Letting them know we want to know them as individuals – with hopes, dreams, joys, concerns, struggles, unique experiences, etc.?

Does this approach and focus come first? What might be some ways to do that (knowing that every parish won’t/can’t do everything... but what would be possible for you):

❖ **Parish registration:** This is probably the first approach that comes to mind and can be an ideal way to begin to get to know our parishioners. The reality to always consider is: what types of questions are we asking? What if we asked questions about:

- Life situation, e.g. single; adoptive/foster parents; widowed; adults caring for aged/ill family members
- Occupation, e.g. homemakers; skilled trades; management; retired
- Interests, e.g. hobbies; recreational activities; special interests; places they have traveled
- Concerns, e.g. issues which currently affect their personal lives; issues in the church and world that concern them the most

# GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

- Experiences with church, e.g. programs/ministries they have been most excited about; programs/ministries that have been of particular help to them in the last three years; programs/ministries they feel could be improved or done more effectively

How do we welcome visitors into our parishes? In many cases, parishes are content with asking them to sign a guest book. That's nice for keeping a record of visitors, but not necessarily for knowing something about them in order to minister to them.

Our parish has had great success by using a visitor's card. Not only does it request basic information, but questions where the visitor is coming from; who they are and what they're looking for. This information is important for appropriate follow up.

<https://oca.org/parish-ministry/parishdevelopment/a-parish-ministries-survey>

energized you? Why were they important to you?

- Preferred type of learning formats, e.g. small group discussions; via technology; self-directed

- ❖ **Meeting Times as people join the parish:** Some parishes – in addition to a written form – complete registration with a face-to-face welcome by someone on the pastoral staff or a trained member of the welcoming committee (at the parish or in the homes of the new parishioners). This approach takes more time and energy, but in parish ministry being effective is often more important than being efficient.

The time could be spent using some of the questions listed above and/or some of these:

- What types of things do you enjoy the most? What makes them enjoyable to you?
- Describe one or two things you have done that have been very important or significant to you. What was it about these experiences that

- Can you complete this sentence: “At the end of my life I would like to look back and know I made a difference \_\_\_\_\_ (doing what?)?”
- What are your hopes in joining this parish?
- What ministries or activities were you involved in at your last parish?

- ❖ **On-going visits and/or surveys:** Why do we only listen to the background, life situations and concerns of our parishioners when they first register in the parish? Are there ways to continue that:

- Home Visits: Do parish staff and/or members of the hospitality committee continually visit parishioners' homes – not to get anything, not to collect money, not to convince them of something, but simply just to visit, pray with and bless them?
- Every few years, might we send a short, light-hearted survey (via email/SurveyMonkey is often easiest) which updates their registration and alerts parish staff and leadership to the interests, needs and concerns of the parishioners.

- ❖ **The demographics of your parish:** In addition to hearing the experiences and concerns of your individual parishioners, stay on top of the statistics/demographics of your parish. This, of course, can be done through your own parish census as well as the demographics that are available from your area (the city, county, region).

- ❖ **Pay attention to local newspapers, local new stories:** These events might tell you – instantly – of the concerns and needs which your parishioners are experiencing.

- ❖ **Pay attention to the latest books and movies:** What is currently capturing the imagination and interest of today's adults, both in the religious and popular sphere?

# GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

❖ **The reality of today's adults:** Knowing our parishioners is most important; at the same time, knowing the research and trends of today's world and culture can also help us "know" our individual adults.

- Are we aware of the dynamics and the challenges of the various types of family configurations today?
- Do we have an understanding of the numerous cultural groups?

Evidence suggests that meditation, prayer, and other related religious and spiritual practices may have significant effects on the aging brain - positive effects that may help improve memory and cognition, mood, and overall mental health.

<https://www.questia.com/library/journal/1P3-2522535601/spirituality-and-the-aging-brain>

- Are we aware of some of the research being done about today's adults, especially in relationship to spirituality and faith? In the last several years, much has been written about the NONES (those who say they have no affiliation with any religion).
- Now there's more and more being written about the DONES (those who have left organized religion; 83% of the DONES consider their Christian faith to be an important part of their everyday lives. They pray regularly and seek outlets for spiritual growth. They aren't done because they lack faith in God). <https://holysoup.com/are-the-dones-really-christian/>.

In understanding the hopes and aspirations of the NONES and DONES, might we be better able to respond to people's needs?

- When we examine and study the research concerning how millennials are using technology today to enhance their spirituality/faith (<http://churchtechtoday.com/2013/12/06/millennials-technology-faith/>) might it guide us in planning young adult opportunities?

- When we're aware of the research on the aging brain (in the sidebar), will it help us respond to the needs of the eldering, the fastest growing age group (not just in our parishes – but in society).
- There are many lenses through which to look at today's adults. For instance, what is the research telling us about the various generations, about the various seasons of life, about the differing life tasks at different ages, the core questions of each age:
  - Young adults: What is my calling?
  - Midlife adults: Who have I become as a person?
  - Mature adults: How do I measure my success as a person?
  - Older adults: What value/legacy have I added to people's lives?

One important thing to remember about considering the different ages/generations: Even though there are many characteristics which appear to be true of a given generation, everyone is an individual. The hallmark of any adult gathering is heterogeneity. Adults are more likely to be different than the same. (A group of 60-year olds is different than a group of 40-year olds, and not all 60-year olds are the same.)

There are usually various generations within a generation. The noted theologian, Karl Rahner, SJ said, "Never take for granted that everyone alive at the same time belongs to the same generation."

Seth Godin remarks: "I'm not sure if it was ever possible to say, 'everyone loves \_\_\_,' 'everyone respects \_\_\_' or even, 'everyone really doesn't like \_\_\_' but there's no doubt at all that this isn't true anymore. There is no more everyone. Instead, there are many pockets of someones." ([http://sethgodin.typepad.com/seths\\_blog/2014/08/index.html](http://sethgodin.typepad.com/seths_blog/2014/08/index.html))

# GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

- **Walk in their Shoes:** As we seek to appreciate others, in all the varied ways that are possible, strive to understand reality through their point of view:

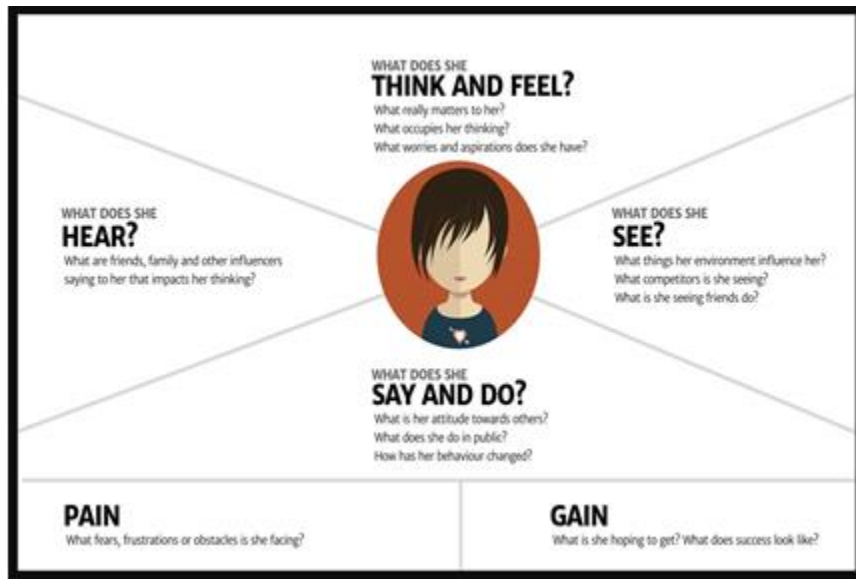


Photo credit: “Adapting empathy maps for UX design.”  
Paul Boag (boagworld)

For more information:

- <https://boagworld.com/usability/adapting-empathy-maps-for-ux-design/>
- <https://www.uxpin.com/studio/blog/the-practical-guide-to-empathy-maps-creating-a-10-minute-persona/>

## Another Look

These suggestions come to us from the business world. Do any of them apply to us in our parishes?

<http://marketingland.com/7-ways-get-know-audience-better-181862>

## GEMS Wonderings

- What do I need to learn in order to lead?
- What in this issue jumped out at me as a new (and needed) possibility?
- Which idea/practice might our parish leadership want to explore?



## Adding New Luster to an Older Gem

GEMS #54 explored today's growing phenomenon of ways of sharing books. Here's another unique one: [Leaving Stacks of Books](#). What might a parish do?



Janet Schaeffler, OP  
[www.janetschaeffler.com](http://www.janetschaeffler.com)  
[jschaeffler@adriandominicans.org](mailto:jschaeffler@adriandominicans.org)

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) and <http://www.lifelongfaith.com/2015-adult-faith-formation-symposium.html>